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ABSTRACT

The Lesbian Herstory Archives is the oldest and largest lesbian archives in the world. This dissertation project examines the role of this community archive in building, defining, redefining, and sustaining community over time. More specifically, this dissertation seeks to explore the relationship between queer archives and community through the following research questions:

1. How does the act of archiving produce community?
2. How does a community archive and project of collective memory, rooted in a specific identity, respond to a radically shifting socio-political climate?
3. In what ways does the deployment of community produce boundaries of inclusion and exclusion?

Drawing from interviews, participant observation, and archival research, this study explores how the changing Archives community mirrors the shifting socio-political climate of the United States. Special attention is paid to how the rhetoric of community is deployed by the Lesbian Herstory Archives in order to secure needed resources. Research findings suggest that the power of this rhetoric might be diminished over time as lesbian identity has become less salient and increasingly critiqued. Relatedly, this study reveals how, despite the best intentions of the organization's founders, the rhetoric of community adopted by the Lesbian Herstory Archives has often relied on a falsely homogenizing understanding of community that is based on a universal lesbian identity construction, leading to exclusions based on race, class, and gender identity. Despite this fact, it is argued that this notion of community, while ambiguous and ripe for criticism, can be a powerful tool to mobilize individuals and groups.

***The Ageing of the Archives: Community, Conflict, and Queer Potential at the
Lesbian Herstory Archives***

by

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Dissertation

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CHAPTER ONE: AN INVITATION

In the early morning hours of Monday, November 21, 2011, Linda “Sparky” Mortimer died alone in her bed. Without warning, this beautiful person, so full of life, was gone. Sparky, owner of a local restaurant and community space, Sparkytown, was the backbone of the Syracuse LGBTQ community. She gathered, fed, and united so many different people under one roof. She supported local queer artists and musicians, and she intentionally created a safe space for LGBTQ folks to *just be*. As long as Sparky was alive, you would always have a place to go, you would get a great big Sparky hug when you got there, and you would leave full of delicious, healthy, comfort food.

I was cloistered away in my apartment writing my first comprehensive exam when I received the call that Sparky had passed away. My books and notes on queer archives, ghostly hauntings, and sociological traces surrounded me. I was writing about my own experiences of working with university and community members to create a local LGBTQ archives- a project that Sparky had inspired and supported wholeheartedly. I dropped everything in the midst of a timed written examination to attend a candlelight vigil in Sparky’s honor that night. The following is a short excerpt from my theory exam, written when I returned from the vigil:

“I have often reflected upon what constitutes an archive, and I have argued passionately for the inclusion of the invisible, the inaudible, the forgotten, and the ephemeral. Less than 24 hours ago, this became deeply personal for me. My conviction shifted from something I knew, something I had intellectualized, to something that I felt to my core- a different kind of knowing....Throughout the day I wrote and cried, cried and wrote, and I felt. I felt Sparky. Her deep, loud laugh, her great big bear hugs and flirtatious pats on the ass. I felt her campy renditions of old womyn’s music.

*Here come the lesbians!
 Here come the leaping lesbians!
 We're going to please you, tease you
 Hypnotize you, try to squeeze you
 We're going to get you if we can
 Here come the lesbians!*

I felt the warmth she radiated as she greeted each and every person that stepped into her restaurant. I felt her pleasure in feeding us all- body and soul.

Sparky had shared hundreds of stories with me; I can tell you what year she came out, how many times she's been to Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, and the names of some of her favorite nuns who taught her how to peel potatoes as a child. But I never got around to "taking" Sparky's oral history- I never properly interviewed her. Though she had shown me countless photographs documenting her amazing life and activism, I never collected them in an acid-free box and had her sign a release form. I can't tell you exactly how many people gathered in front of Sparkytown on Monday night to honor her memory, but I can tell you what the glow of so many candles looks like. I can try to put into words what it felt like to be surrounded by so many others who loved her as much as I did.

For those who would advocate for a traditional archive, Linda "Sparky" Mortimer is gone, without a trace. But for those who would advocate an expanded archive, an archive of feeling, an archive of hauntings, an archive of the ephemeral, the work of archiving a spark has only just begun."

The partially burned candle from that vigil, and the program from Sparky's official memorial service sit on my bookshelf next to a cough drop Sparky gave my wife just days before her passing. These traces share shelf space with Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters*, Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feeling*, and Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*. Together, they form the foundation for this dissertation project, and a sort of archive of their very own.

In the early months of developing my dissertation research project, I was drawn to the queer archive as a site for knowledge production and dissemination. My emphasis was not on the communities producing and produced by the archives at this time. However, as I worked with Syracuse community members and university faculty to develop a local LGBTQ archives, I could see community itself playing a larger and more central role in the work we were doing. I was introduced, often by Sparky Mortimer, to older gays and

lesbians living in the Syracuse area, and I became fascinated by the dynamics of intergenerational exchange taking place. Over time, my interest was drawn away from the archival materials and process, and towards the social subtleties and undercurrents surrounding the project. This local scholarship and activism helped to shape my dissertation project as it exists today.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation project seeks to honor lesbian elders and the incredible communities they have built from the ground up, while simultaneously imagining queer potentials for a younger generation that seeks to forge their own paths and claim their own identities. It examines the role of one community archive in building, defining, redefining, and sustaining community over time. Stemming from this broader framework, this ethnography of an archive contributes to sociological theories of community, as well as queer and feminist theories of community, identity, and generational change.

More specifically, this dissertation seeks to explore the relationship between queer archives and community through the following research questions:

1. How does archiving produce community? How is this like or unlike other forms of community creating?
2. How does a community archive and project of collective memory, rooted in a specific identity and created in response to a particular set of social and political circumstances, respond to a radically shifting socio-political climate?
3. In what ways does the deployment of community produce boundaries of inclusion and exclusion? How does this take place at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, and why?

Over the course of nine months in 2013 I explored these questions by conducting interviews, participant observation, and archival research.

The chapters that follow tell the story of one particular grassroots community archives, the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the largest and oldest lesbian archives in the world (Strock, 1992). Through a series of formal and informal conversations and interactions with individuals connected to the Archives, and through a deep dive into the contents of the Archives itself, I have collected a mass of testimony, conjecture, representation, observation, information, and emotion- at once beautiful and ugly, multifarious and far too simplistic, fact and fabrication. In the following pages, I weave these various threads together in order to provide a cohesive portrait and analysis of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, while honoring the complexity of an organization ever in flux.

Chapter Overviews

Organized into six chapters, the first chapter of this dissertation introduces the project and situates it within larger scholarly frameworks, and the final chapter provides a brief summary and conclusion to the project. Chapter two, *An Ethnography of the Archives*, provides a description of and justification for the methodological approach used in this project. In addition to detailing the multi-method approach and highlighting the major limitations of the research, this chapter aims to reflexively locate me, the researcher, as a subjective participant in the study. Here I explore the role of desire within the project- how desire impacts nearly all aspects of the research, from the lines of inquiry pursued, to the measure of (dis)comfort experienced by researcher and participants alike. Relatedly, I end the chapter with a discussion of the push and pull that I experienced throughout my research at the Lesbian Herstory Archives- the pull into the welcoming arms of the Archives community that sees me, female-bodied and lesbian-identified, as a valid member

of this community, and then the opposing push to challenge and highlight the often-exclusionary attitudes and practices of the organization.

Chapter three, *The Ageing of the Archives*, introduces the Lesbian Herstory Archives as a cultural and community site of memory, and it provides the historical and socio-political context to LHA's founding. This chapter describes how the Lesbian Herstory Archives was created in order to fulfill functions typically addressed by other societal institutions, particularly, the family. In its early years, the Lesbian Herstory Archives met the needs of countless lesbian individuals, particularly the need for a tangible history and connection to the past, and relatedly, the need for family and belonging.

Chapter three also introduces the ageing of the archives framework and traces the evolution of the Lesbian Herstory Archives from its humble beginnings in a Manhattan apartment to a three-story brownstone in Brooklyn, New York, highlighting the changes brought about by the shifting political climate, the institutionalization of the organization, and the opening of LHA to the public. The move to Brooklyn, into a bigger, better space, required the raising of a lot of money in a short time, and marked the founders, and symbolically, the lesbian community, as "home owners". Notably, while these are all measures of progress by neo-liberal standards, Archives elders experienced this "progress" as loss. Hence, this chapter underlines the very subjective nature of progress- for some, progress means assimilation: the right to marry and adopt children, the right to form normative families, the right to own and consume. For others, these changes do not represent progress at all, but rather a move away from radical politics, and the devaluing of lesbian culture and history.

The relationships between three generations of LHA members are explored in chapter three, underscoring the role of intergenerational exchange, or the passing down of community knowledge and archival skills from one generation to the next. Drawing from in-depth interviews with coordinators, interns, and volunteers at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the assumption of a one-directional flow of knowledge is called into question. The chapter begins to investigate some of the ways in which intergenerational exchange, while often a source of inspiration and connection for old and young, can be fraught with conflict. Ultimately, my research led to the discovery that despite the fears of Archives elders that they might be phased out, a middle generation of coordinators and volunteers are committed to carrying on the work, and members of the youngest generation at the Archives are deeply invested in the politics and culture of the lesbian past.

Chapter four begins by exploring the many meanings that individuals attribute to community. Supported by interview and archival data, a holistic, unified definition of community is critiqued, focusing instead on issues of identity, fluidity, and contested naming. I found that while participants are critical of the concept of community, they recognize the important role community plays in their lives. Next, the chapter focuses specifically on the Lesbian Herstory Archives community, drawing from interview data to outline several layers of community existing within and around the Archives. I found that community, as a rhetorical tool, is deployed with intent and specificity by the Archives' coordinators in order to secure various resources: funding, donations of materials to be archived, and community engagement. Relatedly, my research found that while individuals associated with the Archives see community as complex, fluid, and fractured, on an organizational level, LHA often relies on a hyper-extended and falsely homogenizing

understanding of community based in a universal lesbian identity, often leading to attitudes and practices of exclusion within the organization. This points to a disconnect between the organization's founding and early mission, and the current state of queer identity and culture in our society.

A significant portion of the chapter centers on issues of inclusion and exclusion at LHA, taking a critical look at who engages with the Archives, and more importantly, who does not, and why. This section of the chapter explores questions of who is represented within the archives- whose lives, whose memories are housed within the Archives' holdings, and who holds the ultimate responsibility for representation within the Archives. While the Lesbian Herstory Archives positions itself as an inclusive space owned by the lesbian community, the makeup of this lesbian community is contested. Questions of how the Archives community is classed, raced, and gendered, and how this in turn impacts the collective memory of a community, are at the forefront of this chapter. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ways in which communities create boundaries, and become bounded. The felt need to defend and protect the community and space they have worked so hard to create is expressed in many interviews with Archives members, and this chapter offers several theories as to why this is the case.

Chapter five, *At Home with the Archives?: Exploring Changing Community Dynamics and Imagining New Queer Potentials*, outlines the many ways the Archives, as an organization, has impacted individual lives and communities. While certainly not an exhaustive list, this lays the groundwork for the claim that the Lesbian Herstory Archives has definitively, without a doubt, shaped lesbian lives, culture, and history, since its founding in the early 1970's. There are more grassroots lesbian archives in existence, more

lesbian and queer-identified librarians in our colleges and universities, and a greater understanding of and more diverse representations of lesbians in popular culture, art, and in scholarly projects as a result of this one organization.

Chapter five also examines how what we might call ‘queer community’ is often described in terms of family and kinship, and how the quest for documenting and preserving lesbian community histories is described in terms of finding one’s ancestral roots. In this way, the archive becomes home: an attic full of memories, an ancestral tree, and a site for the transmission of oral history. This connection between community and kinship may be one way in which queer communities differ from other geographic-based communities, or other identity-based communities. For instance, while non-queer individuals may identify their heritage in terms of bloodlines, queer individuals, sometimes exiled from their communities of birth, formulate alternative kinship arrangements.

Theoretical and Substantive Significance

While there is an ever-growing body of empirical studies of LGBTQ community archives (Rawson, 2009; 2014; Giesecking, 2015; McKinney, 2015), few examine such archives from a sociological perspective. Arondekar (2009) posits that there is a need “for scholars to move from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject, to pay attention to the process of archiving, not just to the archive as a repository of facts and objects” (15). Kaplan (2000) furthers this claim, arguing that little has been written “about the motives of their founders or how the missions, collecting policies, publication decisions, and other defining characteristics of such repositories have been shaped. Few works have examined the underlying social or political conditions that motivate these activities and decisions” (144). This project, then, answers this call for moving beyond “archive-as-source,” and

positions the queer archive as the subject and center of inquiry. In tracing the trajectory of one specific lesbian archives, this project draws from sociological contributions to theories of community and identity to bring the field into the conversation around archives as social processes.

Located at the intersections of queer studies, feminist studies, and sociology, this project acknowledges queer critiques of sociology as well as sociological critiques of queer theory and attempts to bridge this divide. Queer theorists and queer studies scholars argue that sociological inquiry either relegates the study of sexuality to the marginalized areas of deviance, gender and sexuality, or completely ignores the sexual and the erotic (Epstein, 2002:197). In addition, queer studies scholars critique sociology's penchant for empirical studies arguing that empirical studies "tend to replicate social divisions, implicitly reasserting the exotica of difference" (Stein and Plummer, 1994:179). Sociologists, on the other hand, critique queer theorists for focusing too heavily on the textual and for failing to ground their theory in empirical data, arguing that "sociology's key concerns- inequality, modernity, institutional analysis- can bring a clearer focus to queer theory" (Stein and Plummer, 1994:184). Keeping these critiques in mind, this dissertation places sexuality and the erotic at the center of inquiry, empirically investigating queer theories of community, identity, and exclusion, hence contributing to both fields of study.

Archives in Context

The following section broadly situates the Lesbian Herstory Archives as an independent community archives. Drawing from contemporary archival studies, delineations between traditional and non-traditional archives are presented, and the Lesbian Herstory Archives is positioned as an alternative archive created in response to

mainstream sites of history preservation that did not recognize lesbian lives and culture. Scholarship on independent and queer community archives is presented side-by-side an exploration of how LHA, in its early years, came to determine who and what belong in a lesbian archive. In this way, the various exclusions that are enacted through the production of community archives, as well as the external and internal power dynamics at work, are briefly explored.

Conceptualizing the Archive

Across disciplines, the term archive refers to a collection of historical records, as well as the physical space in which the records are kept. Hogan highlights how the archive functions as both noun and verb:

As a noun, the archive is both physical repository, where materials are stored for preservation and for perusal, and reference point, where the records are consulted. As a verb, the archive functions as a social project of history building and a facilitator for storytelling. (2009:199)

Records in an archive tend to document the activities and business dealings of a person, family, corporation, association, community, or nation. In order for such records to make it into an archive, however, they must be “recognized as having long term value” (Bastian and Alexander 2009: ix). Who determines what and who qualifies as having long-term value? Within ‘mainstream’ public or government funded archives there are

...factors inherent in conventional record creating and keeping practices that mean that some can afford to create and maintain records and some cannot; that certain voices thus will be heard loudly and some not at all; that certain views and ideas about society will in turn be privileged and others marginalized. (Flinn et al. 2009:74)

Critical archive scholars posit that alternative or non-traditional archive formations have emerged as collective responses to mainstream/traditional archiving practices that have excluded those on the margins (Arondekar, 2005; Flinn, 2007; Flinn et al. 2009; X et al.,

2009; Bastian and Alexander, 2009). In cases where marginalized individuals and communities are included, they are “viewed as objects (of concern, of action, or surveillance) rather than as citizens and individual actors in their own right” (Flinn et al. 2009:73). In fact, the Lesbian Herstory Archives, which proudly identifies as a “radical departure from conventional archival practices,” was created by its founders as an alternative to traditional sites of history preservation which filtered lesbian history and culture through “patriarchal eyes,” rendering lesbians as sexual deviants, criminals, or worse, entirely invisible (lesbianherstoryarchives.org/history). As cofounder Joan Nestle recalls, “We were tired of being the medical, legal, and religious other” (1998: 227).

Traditional vs. Non-Traditional Archives

...the dynamic structures of communities and their complex cultural expressions challenge archivists to look beyond traditional practice and embrace new ways of seeing and understanding records. Today it is the minor narratives, the untold stories, the traces, the whispers and the expressions of marginalized identities that people yearn to find in the archives. Their success may depend on the availability of evidence, but their success may also depend on the availability of archivists to recognize and accept this evidence into the archives, for the stuff of minor narratives may not always be perceived as archival. If the archive is to be a place where all stories can be found, then archivists must expand their own horizons, extending traditional boundaries of recordness to embrace a larger and more inclusive vision of the records that communities create. (Bastian and Alexander, 2009)

This statement from the introduction to the anthology *Community Archives: the Shaping of Memory* (2009) can be read as a wakeup call to archivists, the intended audience for the volume. The failure of mainstream archives and archivists to respond to shifting, dynamic communities and their yearnings is a main focus of the collection.

Central to this call to action is the imperative for the expansion of archivists’ understandings of what constitutes an archive. Bastian and Alexander (2009) offer a list of possible forms of record under an expanded, more inclusive archive: “traditional evidence-

bearing documents,” “more elusive and difficult to capture oral expressions,” “artificially created and reconstructed collections,” “electronic traces,” “performances and music,” “monuments and locations,” and “commemorations and cultural activities such as community festivals and parades” (xxiii). These “unofficial records that might not be normally preserved, let alone widely available” would be welcomed in, and in fact essential to the expanded archive (Flinn and Stevens, 2009:32). Interestingly, the Lesbian Herstory Archives were not founded or formed by trained archivists or historians, and I believe this contributed to a freedom felt by the founders and early coordinators to eschew traditional collecting practices and instead create an expanded archive- all of this three and half decades before those in the fields of library and archival studies advocated such an approach. Individuals associated with the LHA were not bound by, nor influenced by, best practices of the profession. As a result, non-traditional archivists built a non-traditional archive.

Others in favor of extending ‘what counts’ in the traditional archive advocate what Jose Munoz terms “an archive of the ephemeral” (Munoz, 1996; Halberstam, 2003; Flinn and Stevens, 2009). Similar to Bastian and Alexander’s expanded archives, this would require the acceptance of less “official” records, such as pamphlets, flyers, matchbooks, and notices, into the archive. Queer Studies scholars such as Munoz and Halberstam are particularly invested in the inclusion of ephemera into the archive as queer communities, spaces, and organizations are often transient, short-lived and dynamic, and therefore can only be documented through such ephemera. This then, requires not only a changing conception of what belongs in an archive, but an expansion of the methods used to collect and document queer histories. Halberstam asserts: “we need to theorize the concept of the

archive and consider new models of queer memory and queer history capable of recording and tracing subterranean scenes, fly-by-night clubs and fleeting trends” (2003:320).

From its earliest days, the Lesbian Herstory Archives has relied on self-defined lesbians and lesbian communities to determine what belongs in the LHA collection. A narrative description of the Archives’ collections, found on the official website, states, “Rather than limit the types of materials we would accept, we decided to honor our communities’ sense of what should be preserved for future generations of lesbians” (www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/tourcoll). According the organization’s Statement of Purpose,

We will collect and preserve any materials that are relevant to the lives and experiences of Lesbians: books, magazine, journals, news clippings (from establishment, Feminist or lesbian media), bibliographies, photos, historical information, tapes, films, diaries, oral histories, poetry and prose, biographies, autobiographies, notices of events, posters, graphics and other memorabilia (www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/history).

This democratic collecting practice has led to the inclusion of some very interesting items in the LHA collection. Some of my favorites, in no particular order, include a set of pasties worn and donated by a lesbian-identified exotic dancer, fencing equipment, a fairly large and imposing dildo, and a leather motorcycle jacket complete with a labrys¹ patch. This certainly represents a departure from traditional collecting practices which rely on individual “experts” with formal archival training to locate and determine the worth of materials considered for inclusion in an archives’ collection.

As an extension of an archive of the ephemeral, many archive scholars promote the inclusion of feeling and emotion as archiveable records (Cvetkovich, 2003; Juhasz, 2006; X

¹ The labrys, a double-headed axe, is a Cretan religious symbol widely adopted by lesbians and feminists in the 1970’s to represent independence and strength.

et al., 2009). For example, Cvetkovich writes that trauma necessarily *demand*s an *unusual* archive that moves beyond the traditional formulations.

...trauma challenges common understandings of what constitutes an archive. Because trauma can be unspeakable and unrepresentable and because it is marked by forgetting and disassociation, it often seems to leave behind no records at all. Trauma puts pressure on conventional forms of documentation, representation and commemoration, giving rise to new genres of expression, such as testimony, and new forms of monuments, rituals, and performances that can call into being collective witnesses and publics. It thus demands an unusual archive, whose materials in pointing to trauma's ephemerality, are themselves frequently ephemeral. Trauma's archive incorporates personal memories, letters, and journals. The memory of trauma is embedded not just in narrative but in material artifacts, which can range from photographs to objects whose relation to trauma might seem arbitrary but for the fact that they are invested with emotional, and even sentimental, value. (2003:7)

X et al. (2009) reiterate the importance of the inclusion of art and performance into the archive, as feeling and emotion are often manifested in or expressed through such outlets.

Experimental documentary filmmaker, Alexandra Juhasz, reflects upon her project, *Video Remains*, which utilizes a homemade video of a dear friend dying of AIDS- a video that invokes and evokes pain, anger, and indeed, trauma. She calls this work "queer archive activism," or work that "comingles history and politics with feelings, feelings of desire, love, hope, or despair" (2006, 326).

Arondekar (2005) sees the inclusion of what has been typically deemed "unofficial records" into the archives as a positive development. However, she cautions against getting caught up in the limiting notion of the archive as *the* definitive source of knowledge about the past. She writes,

Even as the concept of a fixed and finite archive has come under siege, there has been an explosion of multiple/alternate archives that seek to remedy the erasures of the past. Scholarship in South Asia, in particular, has recast the colonial archive as a site of endless promise, where new records emerge daily and where accepted wisdom is both entrenched and challenged. (2005: 11)

While Arondekar is not arguing for a complete rejection of archives or archiving as a practice, she is advocating critical reading practices that juxtapose “the archive’s fiction-effects (the archive as a system of representation) alongside its truth-effects (the archive as material with “real” consequences), as both antagonistic and co-constitutive” (2005:12). In other words, we must understand the archive and its contents as socially constructed by particular groups for particular purposes, while recognizing these constructions as embedded in systems of power with real-life consequences for all involved. In the words of Derrida, “archivization produces as much as it records the event” (1996: 17).

In addition to an expanded conceptualization of what constitutes an archive, some scholars wish to imagine the archive as more than a one-dimensional repository for records, or a “hall of dead letters” (Harvey, 2011:632). Speaking to the creation of queer archives, Halberstam writes,

It is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory and a complex record of queer activity. In order for an archive to function, it requires users, interpreters, cultural historians to wade through the material and piece together the jigsaw puzzle of queer history in the making. (2003: 326)

In other words, the non-traditional archive can be referred to as a “living archive” (Hall, 2001; X et al., 2009; Harvey, 2011; Hogan, 2009), where “the archive ceases to exist when it is no longer engaged in creating, recreating and telling stories” (X et al., 2009:199). Here, we see the importance of the human subject within the archives- a focus not lost on Joan Nestle, cofounder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, who wrote passionately of her hope for a living archives: “The Archives must never be a dead place, a worshipping of the past, but it must show its connection with the Lesbian present, with the struggles and glories of each Lesbian generation” (Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter, no. 5, 1979). For this reason,

community participation in building, maintaining, and engaging the collection is imperative to the success of the LHA.

While discussions of the changing nature of archives and archiving practices are productive in situating the Lesbian Herstory Archives as different from, and even specifically created in opposition to, mainstream heritage organizations, such a dichotomy deems past and public archives as traditional and lacking and new alternative archives as living and dynamic. This simplistic division can limit our understanding of the diversity of archives, new and old. In fact, X et al. further complicate this assumed binary by calling into question the concept of mainstream, pointing out that there are “competing definitions of the ‘mainstream’- sometimes the ‘gay mainstream,’ sometimes the ‘Black mainstream,’ sometimes the culture of a dominant elite” (X et al., 2009: 274). In fact, LHA, a self-defined radical archive that constructed itself in opposition to the mainstream in 1974, could very well be considered mainstream forty years later. For example, those seeking to undo categories of sex and gender, categories of identity that LHA greatly relies on, may define the organization as “mainstream”. Just as the contents of an archives are subjectively determined and constructed across time, so too, is the character and presentation of that archival organization as a whole.

Independent Community Archives

Discussions around the changing nature of archives are sparked in large part by the proliferation of community archives, particularly in the United Kingdom. Flinn, one of the foremost scholars of community archives, puts forth a “broad and inclusive” conceptualization of independent community archives: “the (often) grassroots activities of creating and collecting, processing and curating, preserving and making accessible

collections relating to a particular community of specified subjects” (2007:154). The rukus! Archive Project’s mission, for example, is to “collect, preserve, exhibit, and otherwise make available for the first time to the public historical, cultural, and artistic materials related to the Black, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities in the United Kingdom through a variety of activities and events” (X et al. 2009:271). Such grassroots archive projects typically operate independently, or semi-independently, from mainstream state sponsored heritage projects. Often, individuals involved in these projects are not officially trained in traditional archival practices, but otherwise invested community members.

Why Archive?

While community archives are created, and maintained for a variety of reasons, reasons as diverse as the communities involved in their creation,

most, if not all, community archivists are motivated and prompted to act by the (real or perceived) failure of mainstream heritage organizations to collect, preserve, and make accessible collections and histories that properly reflect and accurately represent the stories of all of society. (Flinn and Stevens, 2009:6)

Many misrepresented or underrepresented communities, such as marginalized ethnic and racial groups (Kaplan, 2000; Arondekar, 2005; X et al., 2009; Flinn et al., 2009), working-class communities (Flinn et al., 2009), and non-normative sexual and gender communities (Hogan, 2009; Arondekar, 2005; Mills, 2006; Cvetkovich, 2003; Halberstam, 2003; Harvey, 2011; Rawson, 2014), have come to understand “that if we don’t archive our own culture, no one else will” (Hogan, 2009:210).

Flinn and Stevens (2009) add that the decision to establish community archives is always a calculated one. “Community narratives are not ‘constituted’ on impulse. The moment when the archive is created and named as such is a moment of reflection and often

a response to other societal conditions. It is an act of resistance against subordination and discrimination” (p. 8). For example, Rawson (2014) writes of archiving as worldmaking. He argues that in a world where transgender histories are “nonexistent or impoverished” (p. 38), “cyberspace provides a revolutionary tool for creating, sharing, and preserving trans histories that would otherwise remain untold” (p. 40). In other words, it is a space where individuals can create a world where trans lives matter (Rawson, 2014). Chapter three, *The Ageing of the Archives*, offers a detailed description of how the Lesbian Herstory Archives was conceived, and of the societal conditions that sparked the reflection that would become LHA.

Often, marginal communities find themselves facing the imperative to present a united, positive identity to mainstream culture in order to combat prejudices of all kinds. For example, the Black Cultural Archives in London are responding to long histories of racism and assimilation. Through a collective heritage project, the BCA “would hope to play a part in improving the image and self-image of people of African and African-Caribbean descent by seeking to establish continuity and a positive reference point” (Flinn et al., 2009:71-72).

In her examination of the 1892 establishment of the American Jewish Historical Society in New York City, Elizabeth Kaplan examines meeting minute records from within the society’s archives to answer these questions: “What prompts people to establish historical societies? What functions do they serve, and what is their enduring appeal?” (2000:144). Set against the backdrop of rampant anti-Semitism in the United States, as well as general political and social unrest throughout Europe and the U.S., American Jews found themselves “operating in an atmosphere of crisis” (p. 130). It was within this socio-

political context that a large group of highly educated and financially successful American Jews met for the first time to create a plan for the American Jewish Historical Society. The group's agreed upon mission: "to craft an image that would protect and preserve the future of American Jewry for generations to come" (p. 130). The crafting of such an image required that the AJHS document and present only images of patriotism, unity and success. The focus became "the collection of documents by which it is shown how the Jews of the United States have attained their high intellectual position...and they are on the highway to greater success" (p. 138). This narrow focus of the AJHS precipitated by "the contemporary climate of xenophobia, aggressive patriotism, and contested ownership of the mantle of the 'true American'" necessitated the exclusion of many American Jews not conforming to the Society's image of the good Jew. Exclusions included poor and uneducated American Jews as well as recent immigrants from Eastern Europe (p. 139).

It's important to note that, from its inception, the Lesbian Herstory Archives has consciously resisted the pressure to present a faultless, sexless image of the lesbian community in order to be more palatable to mainstream society. In fact, cofounder Joan Nestle, having experienced being ostracized by the lesbian-feminist community of the 1970's for being femme-identified and sex positive, warns against respectability politics:

If we ask decorous questions of history, we will get a genteel history. If we assume that because sex was a secret, it did not exist, we will get a sexless history...For many years the psychologists told us we were both emotionally and physically deviant; they measured our nipples and clitorises to chart our queerness, they talked about how we wanted to be men and how our sexual styles were pathetic imitations of the real thing and all along under this barrage of hatred and fear, we loved.... We create history as much as we discover it. What we call history becomes history and since this is a naming time, we must be on guard against our own class prejudices and discomforts... (1998)

The LHA's collection practice of accepting any donation of material deemed important to the lesbian community, without censure or judgement, is an attempt to represent all lesbians, regardless of politics, sexual proclivities, race, or class. It is often pointed out by those affiliated with the Archives that one will find the *Off Our Backs* publication next to the *On Our Backs* publication within the archives' periodicals collection, and one coordinator told me of a special collection documenting the life of a lesbian Nazi (M. Wolfe, personal communication, July 25, 2013).

An additional motivation for the establishment of community archives is directly connected to those previously outlined. Part of the mission of many community archive projects is to educate (often) younger generations of the community, and in the process "generate civic and social engagement within and beyond a given community (in support of young people who share the same self-categorization)" (Flinn and Stevens, 2009:18). The rukus! Archive Project directors point to this education and legacy building as an important reason for archiving. "In the future when someone says, 'Black gay history, what is it? There isn't any,' or people from our own community say, 'We have no legacy,' we'll be able to point to the archive and say, 'This happened or that happened'" (X et al., 2009:281). Like the rukus! Archive Project, the Lesbian Herstory Archives centers the passing down of cultural and historical knowledge to future generations. Intergenerational communication and exchange is a focal point at LHA, and their thriving internship program emphasizes this goal. Chapter three further explores the role of intergenerational exchange and conflict within the Archives.

Unlikely Partnerships?

Because of the often counter-hegemonic reclamation projects of community archives, the autonomy of a particular group building their archives is paramount. Flinn et al. write, "...the defining characteristic of community archives is the active participation of a community in documenting and making accessible the history of their particular group and/or locality *on their own terms*" [original emphasis] (2009:73). Community archive projects committed to unearthing subjugated knowledge(s) must work to shift and subvert existing power-knowledge systems that determine which narratives are told, how, and by whom. Flinn et al. continue:

A community's custody over its archives and cultural heritage means power over what is to be preserved and what is to be destroyed, how it is to be described and on what terms it is to be accessed. This allows the community to exercise some control over its representation and the construction of its collective and public memory. (2009:83)

To partner with a mainstream heritage organization or a state supported public institution may feel like, and actually be, in many cases, a detriment to the goals of particular community archive projects. Some community archivists maintain, "you should not depend on an establishment with which you are at times in conflict for the validation of your culture and history" (Flinn et al. 2009:80). As Pat Leslie, founder of the Canadian Women's Movement Archives contends:

To ask the patriarchy to preserve our lives for us is a suicidal act. We do not need to be researched by patriarchal/academic institutions; we do not need to be financially supported by governments, capitalist or otherwise. What we do need is a link to future generations of feminists and lesbians who will have access to our lives. (Hogan, 2009:202)

Unfortunately, Leslie lost her battle to keep the CWMA within the community and independent of all mainstream institutions when in 1992, all holdings of the CWMA were transferred to a library at the University of Ottawa (Hogan, 2009).

One of the founding principles of the Lesbian Herstory Archives is that, “All Lesbian women must have access to the Archives; no academic, political, or sexual credentials will be required for use of the collection; race and class must be no barrier for use or inclusion,” and hence, another guiding principle, “the Archives shall be housed within the community, not on an academic campus that is by definition closed to many women” (lesbianherstoryarchives.org/history). Moving beyond issues of accessibility, in further explanation of this commitment to remain independent of any academic or government institution, Nestle writes,

In order to survive in homophobic America as an archives, we have incorporated ourselves as a not-for-profit information resource center because the New York State Board of Regents maintains control over educational institutions and could therefore confiscate the collection for ‘just cause.’ In the same year we incorporated (1978), a law was pending in New Jersey recriminalizing homosexuality, and everyone knows criminals have no archives. We take no money from the government, believing that such an action would be an exercise in neocolonialism, believing that the society that ruled us out of history should never be relied upon to make it possible for us to exist. All the technology the archives has- the computer, the Xeroxing machine- comes from lesbian, gay, feminist, and radical funding sources (Nestle, 1998: 232).

It’s striking to me, as I reread Nestle’s words, how timely these concerns are. Forty-four years after the Archives were founded based on these principles of independence, we are now under the rule of an authoritative administration that has publically voiced its intentions of destroying and defunding information, education, and science that does not align with their religious dogma and capitalist aims.

Eichhorn (2013) argues that LHA's refusal to accept outside funding "has enabled it to not only survive but continue to grow during an era when other feminist and queer institutions have succumbed to neoliberalism's pressure to collapse or conform" (p. 47). However, as seen in the case of the Canadian Women's Movement Archives, for some community archives, not partnering with a mainstream institution is not a viable option. Sustaining an entirely independent community archive can be incredibly difficult. Burnout of community members and organizers, lack of resources, and long-term sustainability in general are barriers to complete autonomy (Flinn and Stevens, 2009; Flinn et al., 2009). While LHA has managed to maintain its independence from academic or government oversight, they are no strangers to the struggles of burnout, lack of resources, and other barriers to long-term stability. Chapter three addresses some of the difficulties faced by the LHA, identifying the source and consequences of these tribulations.

Interrogating 'Community' and Naming Exclusions

The process of archiving is "an intensely social practice," (X et al., 2009:272) whereby "through a common affective investment in the archives we become members of a 'community of time,'" (Flinn and Stevens, 2009:17). The question remains, who can claim membership to this 'community of time'? How are boundaries drawn around particular communities? And what exactly do we mean by 'community'?

Despite its importance in the social sciences, the concept of community lacks clarity. In fact, across five decades of sociology of community studies scholarship, this lack of clarity is perhaps the one idea widely agreed upon² (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Bell and Newby, 1974; Crow and Allan, 1995; Kenyon, 2000). A second common understanding of

² A 1955 study found 94 separate definitions of community, concluding that "there is no complete agreement as to the nature of community" (Hillery, 1955: 119).

community is that it is a “dynamic, complex and changing experience and process” (Kenyon, 2000: 21).

Early formulations of community can be catalogued into two types: one geographical, referring to neighborhoods, towns, and cities; and the other “relational,” focusing on the “quality of character of human relationship, without reference to location”(Gusfield, 1975:xvi). Peter Willmott (1989) referred to these types of community as “territorial” and “attachment,” respectively. While this particular formulation of community posits two discrete types, Gusfield and other community scholars of the time recognized that the types were not mutually exclusive (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). In other words, “the analytical distinction between community as meaning and community as place is not reproduced so neatly in practice, since complex interconnections exist between the two” (Crow and Allan, 119: 151). Chapter four reveals this complexity, as it was reflected in the interviews I conducted and the descriptions provided by the participants who repeatedly constructed their experiences of community as multiple and layered as opposed to existing as discrete types.

While the term ‘community’ has been deemed an ill-defined, “reductive euphemism” (Flinn and Stevens, 2009:5), self-identification as a community member must reign supreme. Flinn et al. clarify:

Whilst the language of ‘community archives’ imposes this term upon us, we take it to encompass all manner of collective self-identifications including by locality, ethnicity, faith, sexuality, occupation, shared interest or by a combination of the earlier mentioned details. A community, in short, is any group of people who come together and present themselves as such... (Flinn et al., 2009:75)

The notion of self-identification into a particular group or community seems like a fair way of delineating communities, however, within many communities there exist gatekeepers

who keep self-identification from being the sole criterion of admission. For example, when community archives are typically created and maintained by a small number of community members, as they often are, ideas about who counts as a member of the particular community may not be a matter of self-identification at all. Hall reminds us: “the very practice of putting the collection together is informed by practitioners who are themselves active participants in defining the archive” (2001, 91).

At the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the organizational model, in theory, discourages decision-making by any one or two powerful individuals. The organization is run by a non-hierarchical committee of Archives’ Coordinators who are self-selected. Any self-identified lesbian woman with a strong commitment to the politics and principles of the organization is eligible to become a Coordinator, and all decisions made by the Coordinating Committee are made by consensus. By all counts, this seems like a pretty democratic, if not effective organization model, but the organization was not always modeled in such a way. The Archives was founded and realized by a small group of individuals who effectively shaped the mission and goals of the organization, a mission and set of goals that have remained stable through the years. These individuals were similar in many ways: white, educated, professional women. In addition, the organization was created to support a specific identity, lesbian, an identity that has since been interrogated, re-negotiated, and by some, rejected. Chapter 4, *Contesting Community*, explores the impact that shifting identities have had on the Archives and its original mission of inclusion, and it outlines the move away from more rigid understandings of identity towards self-definition and fluidity.

Exclusion from membership in a particular community is often a result of narrow constructions of identity that do not allow for fluidity, complexity, or change over time

(Flint et al., 2009; Hogan, 2009; Kaplan, 2000; Halberstam, 2003). Kaplan's study of the American Jewish History Society provides an excellent example of this. In an effort to combat public opinion that said Jewish Americans were 'not American enough,' American Jews sought to fashion a collective American Jewish identity that would counter this notion. In the process, however, the collective identity that was created by the Society excluded many individuals and groups who could not or would not conform to such an identity (2000).

Queer communities, and by extension, their archives, often fall into the trap of reifying identity, drawing firm boundaries around themselves in the process. Many queer scholars have written of the very narrow and exclusionary reality of what is projected to be a diverse queer community (Halberstam, 2003; Mills, 2006; Joseph, 2002; Serano, 2013). Ghaziani, Taylor and Stone write, "Although LGBT movements had defined their internal differences as a source of unity and strength since the days of homophile organizing, scholars have shown that African American, Latina/o, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and transgender groups felt marginalized by the contradictions between movements' rhetoric of diversity and its leadership profile, which was largely white, middle class, and male" (2016:169-170). Hogan (2009) writes of her experience with researching Canadian gay and lesbian archives where she discovered that the two main gay and lesbian archives in Canada were created by and for gay men and had few records of lesbian lives. Mills (2006) takes the critique of queer communities a step further arguing that the privileging of sexual orientation over gender within queer communities and social movements has produced a very real set of boundaries and omissions. "...the T in 'LGBT' is often a fake T...transgender mainly comes into view as a subcategory of sexual identity rather than as a mode of

identification that is experientially prior” (p. 256). Chapter three of this dissertation describes the creation of the LHA as a response to gay-male dominated organizations and spaces, while Chapter four situates the LHA within the context of past and current debates around gender identity, woman-only space, and Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism. Furthermore, Chapter four highlights the disconnect between LHA’s inclusionary policy of self-identification and the personal views and experiences of many Archives elders.

Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani’s study of the Chicago Dyke March can help us to better understand the disconnect between intent and practice in social movements. The Dyke March, founded in 1993, was created with the goal of providing an activism-based, racial and gender inclusive alternative to increasingly corporatized, male-dominated, and white-washed Gay Pride Parades and Celebrations. Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani (2009) found that despite the Dyke March being intended as a “corrective response”, the 2003 Chicago iteration of the Dyke March faced many of the same challenges and produced a largely homogenous collective: “the majority of participants appeared similar to the organizers: most were young, white, urban women wearing short haircuts and t-shirts with political slogans”(p.52). Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani argue that this failure to create an inclusive event was due to a tension in the Chicago Dyke March’s movement culture- a tension between ideology and identity. “Organizers embraced an explicit ideology of broad inclusion while implicitly using the March as a vehicle to celebrate their own, narrower dyke identity” (2009:52). Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani remind us that, “actors may not always be so rational, and they may experience a conflict of interest between their stated (public) and unstated or unacknowledged (private) intentions” (2009:54).

The overlap between the Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani-described 2003 Chicago Dyke March and the trajectory of the Lesbian Herstory Archives is striking. Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani's assertion that "while organizers publicly define 'dyke' in expansive terms consistent with their vision of producing an inclusive event, they privately reveal a narrower definition," could have been written about the Lesbian Herstory Archives. The official guiding principles of the LHA, first written in 1979, have changed little over the course of 40 years, and "the development of the principles was rooted in the assumption of sustainability from the diversity, power, and multiplicity of lesbian communities" (Smith-Cruz et al., 2016). As I will discuss further in chapter four, this ideological commitment to inclusion, while commendable, is often in tension with and bested by organizers' need and desire to create community that reflects and celebrates their own specific identities.

In a further critique of identity-based community, Halberstam asserts that "at a time when 'gay and lesbian community' is used as a rallying cry for fairly conservative social projects aimed at assimilating gays and lesbians into the mainstream life of the nation and the family..." the concept of community should be eschewed altogether to make room for the more fluid and oppositional signifier of subculture (2003:315). As Gamson notes, it can be "as liberating and sensible to demolish a collective identity as it is to establish one" (1995: 402). Interestingly, many of the Archives' elders agree with Halberstam's fear of the rapid assimilation of gays and lesbians into the mainstream, however, they see strong, lesbian community as an antidote to assimilation, not an accelerant. After all, as Ghaziani, Taylor and Stone (2016) remind us, assimilation represents a move away from a politics of difference and towards a politics of sameness. It's a "desire to normalize gay and lesbian identity and fit into, rather than change US society" (p. 172). When gay and lesbian

individuals seek to highlight their similarity to the mainstream, identity-based community becomes less important, and potentially detrimental to this goal of assimilation. Chapter three draws on my interview data to question the assumed connection between assimilation and progress, highlighting the complex role of community and identity in resisting being subsumed into the mainstream.

Community members, as well as archivists working in community archives (who may or may not be one in the same), must remain aware of and sensitive to the pitfalls of reifying fixed identity categories. Kaplan gives warning to even archivists with the best intentions:

Archivists seeking to balance the record, to incorporate authentic voices, to resolve the problem of the undocumented, or even, sometimes, to celebrate diversity must reify identity, thereby making cultural differences immutable and eliminating individuality, personality, and choice within the group in question. All of this requires an essentialist outlook. (2000:148)

Working towards the creation of community archives that avoid the reification of identity categories and that see both the community and its archive as a living, permeable, ever-changing collection with no definitive boundaries, is a worthy endeavor. In the meantime, however, interrogating systems of power operating within and upon community archives can serve to make transparent, if not alleviate, exclusions taking place. LHA's negotiation of difference within the Archives' collection and community is the topic of Chapter four, *Contesting Communities*.

LGBTQ Archives

Though the Lesbian Herstory Archives is the oldest and largest lesbian archives in the world, it is certainly not alone as a site for the collection and preservation of lesbian and queer memory and history. According to Brown (2011) "it is hard to say how many

LGBT archives started up during and since the 1970s as many merged with others, became part of mainstream archives, or closed,” but cursory searches reveal more than 50 active LGBTQ archives in the United States at the time of this research.

These archives recording the lives and experiences of LGBTQ communities share many of the characteristics seen in other community archives, however, queer archives also stand apart from other types of community archives in a number of ways. Cvetkovich, queer theorist and archivist, argues, “that gay and lesbian history even exists has been a contested fact, and the struggle to record and preserve it is exacerbated by the invisibility that often surrounds intimate life, especially sexuality” (2003:272). As a result of the invisibility of sexuality and sexual practice, as well as the deliberate silencing of any and all who fall outside of the stringent categories of normative gender and sexuality, queer archivists and historians find themselves “sifting the past to recover what isn’t there but was” (X et al., 2009:272).

Although writing specifically about the rukus! Archive Project in the United Kingdom, X et al. identify themes that, regardless of nation, might testify to “some alternative ‘norms’ around which queer cultures coalesce” (2009:276). Queer archive scholars argue that central to the lives and experiences of LGBTQ individuals and communities are deeply felt emotion and trauma (Cvetkovich 2003; X et al. 2009; Ahmed, 2009). As a result, “an unusual archive...that resists coherence of narrative or that is fragmented and ostensibly arbitrary” is required (Cvetkovich, 2003:242).

To satisfy the demand for an ‘unusual archive,’ queer archivists have turned to various forms of technology. Hogan (2009) writes of the Canadian queer podcast, *Dykes on Mykes*, arguing:

New means of communication have thus afforded otherwise invisible and marginalized lesbian communities the means with which to re-represent community, challenge dominant representations, highlight the importance of minority representation itself, and archive the results of their activity and activism. (210)

Alternatively, Juhasz (2006) using experimental documentary filmmaking, created a digital archive of AIDS which consists of videotaped interviews with persons with AIDS and their loved ones. She suggests, “we can use archival media to remember, feel anew, analyze, and educate, ungluing the past from its melancholic grip, and instead living it as a gift with others in the here and now” (326). In addition to being used in creating an ‘unusual archive’ that can challenge dominant representations, technology is being utilized by queer archives/archivists to make more accessible those multiple histories being recorded (Harvey, 2011; Hogan, 2006).

Queer theorists invested in archiving LGBTQ lives present a strong case for queering the archive. This entails that we “oppose not only the hegemony of dominant culture, but also the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian culture” (Halberstam, 2003:320). For some, this requires abandoning deeply engrained linear progress narratives and success stories (Ahmed, 2009; Halberstam, 2003; Mills, 2006). Mills argues that we must

Resist the tendency to fashion queer history simply as a story of progression from repression to visibility and outness...for in presenting LGBT history as a diachronic tale of homophobia, outing, and community formation, [queer archives] have difficulty confronting multiple temporalities of sex and gender within a single moment-ongoing synchronic tensions within and across communities and cultures that fail to cohere around the motif of being ‘in’ or ‘out.’ (2006:256)

In other words, queer archives that subscribe to models of linear progression exclude many queer lives and experiences that do not necessarily align with such models. Both chapters three and four address the tension experienced by LHA elders as they resist a cultural moment where progress *is* associated with the passage of time, where each successive

generation is deemed more enlightened, more open-minded, more “woke”³. At the same time, challenges to the boundaried community of the LHA raise important questions of inclusion and exclusion.

Mills concludes his article, *Queer Is Here?*, with an inspired vision of the forms that queer history and queer archives can take:

Linear-progress narratives will be abandoned in favour of stories that take as their point of departure sexual intensities, tastes and roles, gender dissonances, dispositions and styles, queer feelings, emotions and desires. Queer-history exhibitions will adopt a style of presentation partly modeled on scrapbooks and collage; in place of the representative ‘object’, they will appropriate fragments, snippets of gossip, speculations, irreverent half-truths. Museum-goers will be invited to consume their histories queerly- interacting with exhibits that self-consciously resist grand narratives and categorical assertions. It will be a mode of display, collecting, and curating driven not by a desire for a petrified ‘history as it really was’ but by the recognition that interpretations change and that our encounters with archives are saturated with desire. (2006:262)

A model so far from traditional understandings of the archival process, Mills’ description takes on a utopic quality. His repeated use of “it will” throughout the passage marks it as a possibility that hovers in the somewhat distant future, just waiting for some brave queer soul(s) to take it up as a set of blueprints for the creation of a truly *queer* archive of the queer. The end of chapter five considers the queer potential of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, highlighting the not quite there-ness of the organization in meeting that potential. As José Muñoz (2009) points out, queer is potential never fully realized. Instead, queer is something we should constantly and consistently strive towards.

Documenting and, in fact, celebrating “queer uses of time and space [which] develop in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction,” then become central to this project of queering the archive (Halberstam, 2003:314). Notably, the

³ According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, “woke is increasingly used as a byword for social awareness”.

Lesbian Herstory Archives was conceived as a response to the exclusion of lesbians from the institutions of family and reproduction in the early 1970's. The founders, understanding the need for connection, history, and yes, ancestry, worked to develop alternative institutions of family and home to meet these needs. Chapter three introduces the idea of the LHA community as family, and the Archives space as home, for many lesbians. Chapter five further highlights the important roles the Archives have played in the lives of lesbians and queer women over the course of forty-four years.

The Invitation



There's a now-iconic image of a young Deb Edel, cofounder of the Archives, looking butch as can be, dressed from head to toe in black leather. She's leaning up against a 1955 Oldsmobile and gazing, unsmiling, into the camera. With ankles crossed and one hand on

her hip, she exudes confidence, defiance, sex. The photo, taken by Morgan Gwenwald in 1986, was made into an LHA postcard that found its way to lesbians across the country. Before finding the postcard in the archive of the Archives, I had read mention of it no less than 6 times, my curiosity growing with each reference made to the legendary image. In one letter to the Archives, the writer thanks Deb for sending information regarding last will and testaments, and notes, “I remember you from that postcard years ago. Boy, did that put a smile on my face!”

For Polly Thistlethwaite, the postcard served as her entryway to the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Polly had just arrived in New York City from the Midwest when she first saw the postcard in 1986: “I saw Morgan Gwenwald’s photo of Deb Edel in which she’s wearing a badass leather jacket⁴—a Dyke’s jacket! I called the LHA number [and] left a message...” (Smith-Cruz et al., 2016). Polly went on to volunteer and serve on the Coordinating Committee for more than a decade. As the postcard circulated, making its way around lesbian circles through bookstores, organizations, and mailing lists, it served as an invitation. For some, the invitation was to recognize oneself in the image, while for others, the invitation was to look and to desire.

There is a growing body of scholarly work on the Lesbian Herstory Archives (Thistlethwaite, 1998; Nestle, 1998; Corbman, 2014; Smith-Cruz et al. 2016; Giesecking, 2015), and I am thrilled to join in that conversation. In the following pages, you’ll find a sociologically grounded examination of a lesbian community archive- an archive born of oppression, nurtured with passion and commitment, and sustained through the blood,

⁴ Eleven years later, Deb gifted that “badass leather jacket” to Polly. The jacket came back full circle when Polly, no longer fitting in the jacket, donated it to the LHA collection a decade later.

sweat, and tears of countless lesbians and queer women over the course of four decades. This dissertation traces the transformation of a community archive from a small collection of lesbian academics with big plans and a small space (the archive collection was originally housed in the back room of Joan Nestle's NYC apartment), to an institution in lesbian communities, known to queer women- young and old- worldwide. And I do mean institution in the colloquial sense. The LHA has made its way in to books, both fiction and non-fiction, it has been satirized in film⁵, and it is known as a lesbian place of pilgrimage and veneration. The Lesbian Herstory Archives and its cultural representations now circulate as a piece of lesbian culture and history. This project documents that transformation, and considers the consequences of such a profound shift.

The second Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter, published in 1976, included a simple plea: "REMEMBER US". This early newsletter, painstakingly keyed on a typewriter and Xeroxed for dissemination, invited an imagined audience of lesbians to "Send us your photographs, your voices, your writings, your drawings, your music, your ideas---so we may be remembered in all our cultural fullness" (Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter, no. 2, 1976). Today, the Archive fills every nook and cranny of a four story brown stone as well as several off-site storage facilities. In the same way that the Lesbian Herstory Archives began with a simple, yet pressing, invitation, I invite you to remember the Lesbian Herstory Archives through this dissertation project. I invite you to consider the shifting commitments and boundaries of the Archives throughout the years, and to project into the future to imagine its potential.

⁵ *The Watermelon Woman* (1996) features an obscure archives, Center for Lesbian Information and Technology (CLIT), widely known to be a parody of the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

CHAPTER TWO: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE ARCHIVE

I regret so much that my time here in Brooklyn is quickly coming to an end. As my final weeks with the Archives wind down, I experience a growing sense of loss. I'm preparing to say goodbye. The Archives has started to feel like home for me- the sense of ease in the space and with these people snuck up on me. At some point, I stopped feeling like an awkward intruder and instead started feeling like a part of something important and beautiful. Today before I head upstairs to my isolated work area where I will commune with the dykes of the past, where I will play third party to the drama and love that unfolds there, I walk into the dining room and greet several women working. Lenal, Molly, and Nicole are all hard at work on their separate tasks. I inquire after their various projects and they ask me how my research is going. Without my asking, Courtney shows me several Special Collections I might find useful. I tell Nicole that I can see how much progress she's made on the processing of one particular collection and she is pleased and proud that I've noticed. Later Courtney comes in and we are happy to see each other. I ask her about the job search and she brings me up to date on the trials of surviving Brooklyn on a barista's budget. Saskia comes in and catches me as I head up the stairs and exclaims, "Bekki! You've really got me thinking!". I assume (correctly) that she means after our two-hour interview last week. She tells me about having conversations with another coordinator about our interview: "You know how we were wondering about if the Archives had done the work? I talked to Paula about it for a long time, and we had!". Saskia is referring to our discussion of whether or not the Archives had done the work of making the organization welcoming to and affirming of lesbians of color. Saskia suggests that I talk to Paula, and when I tell her I've had a hard time finding contact information for both Paula and Judith, she offers to connect me to them. I walk up the stairs smiling, and when I sit down at my crowded workspace with a new stack of folders to go through, for several minutes I just sit there with the feeling of belonging, with the feeling of being home. (researcher fieldnotes, August 2, 2013)

I begin this chapter with the above field notes excerpt as a way to not only locate myself subjectively within the Archives, but to draw attention to community building as methodological tool, process, and research finding. My regular presence at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, and the relationships built with Archives volunteers, interns, and coordinators over the course of nine months in 2013 served to increase my access to the space and to research participants and collaborators, while also producing significant experiences of community and community building, one of the key points of inquiry for this dissertation. In the following pages, I set out to provide the reader with an overview of the specific methods used in collecting data, a sense of how the various methodological

approaches were carried out, and most importantly, a discussion of my own embodiment, desire, and subjectivity within the Archives and archives community.

An Ethnography of an Archive

First, it is important to emphasize that I came to the archives not as a historian or archivist, but as an ethnographer and social theorist. While, as Agatha Beins points out, “studies of archives tend to focus on the materials in the archive and not necessarily on the people who occupy the archive or on the space of the archive itself, except in relation to the archival object,” (2015:34) as a sociologist, this project intentionally centers the social dynamics that take place within the archives rather than the archival objects themselves. Undoubtedly those objects that make up the archives’ collections are important and convey fascinating stories of their own, nonetheless, this dissertation is interested in these objects to the extent that they relate to the individuals and groups whose stories they tell, those who deem them worthy of preservation, and the degree to which the objects serve to facilitate feelings of belonging and community. Beins, a feminist scholar and longtime volunteer at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, addresses the potentials of moving beyond the archival object as subject of inquiry:

But what happens when we can see the quotidian conversations that happen in the archive, the kisses that happen at the Valentine’s Day dance, and the strategizing meetings set up by the LHA coordinators as archival objects? The LHA newsletter and now online social media preserve such “ephemera” through reports about them, photographs, and reminders of their traces linger in the space of the archives, in the personal connections made, and in the ways that “lesbian community” becomes a coherent formation for individuals. (2015:35)

Beins goes on to suggest that lesbian community itself is an archival object- “something that requires care, preservation, and curation,” and it is this understanding that served as my point of departure as I began my field research in the Spring of 2013 (2015:34).

I consider my methodological approach an ethnography of the archives, placing the archive, as practice and product, at the center of my research inquiries. With the aim of acquiring the richest data possible, and allowing for a nuanced analysis of the relationship between queer archives and community, my research design implements a variety of qualitative methods at a New York City-based lesbian archive, the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

The methodological design of this ethnographic study includes in-depth interviews, participant observation and fieldwork, archival research, as well as textual analysis of written material. It is important to note that in practice, these diverse methodologies are not unconnected, but instead they bleed into one another and amount to a relatively fluid research process. For example, taking a break from the isolation of archival research often led to grabbing a coffee from down the street with one or two Archives interns, which might then to informal conversation about the Archives, and also provide me with a glimpse of the day-to-day goings on at LHA. Sometimes, these interactions would lead to scheduling a formal interview, which might, in turn, lead to plans to “hang out” later in the day or week.

Seventeen semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting between one and three hours were conducted with the founders, select members of the coordinating committee, volunteers, interns, and researchers/visitors at the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Fourteen of the seventeen interviews were conducted in-person, with the remaining three interviews conducted via Skype.

These interviews took place in a variety of locations, depending on each participant’s preference. Some took place in the LHA dining room, where brief pauses were

necessary for the interviewee to go and attend to a researcher in need of guidance, others took place in crowded coffee shops, where the clinking of silverware and the calling out of orders competes with the actual interview conversation on the recorded audio, while some of the most intimate interviews were conducted in the homes of the interviewee. Each interview played out like more of a dialogue- a conversation between strangers with a common investment in queer history and archives. I approached each interview with a list of guiding questions, but inevitably the interview would take on a life of its own and develop in quite remarkable ways. Instead of an interaction strictly guided by roles- I, the researcher, asking the questions while they, the participant, answered them- the interviews became collaborative constructions of meaning and connection between two individuals. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and then coded using a two-part coding system. Initial coding was done by hand and each interview was coded in relation to the other interviews in order to create a master list of primary codes. The second level of coding was done using Dedoose coding software.

Participant observation included attending public events sponsored by the organization and casual social interactions with individuals affiliated with the sites. I spent on average twelve hours per week at the Lesbian Herstory Archives over the course of three months, engaging with the site through volunteer work and archival research. Detailed field notes were written after each session of participant observation, amounting to hundreds of pages of field notes data.

Some of the most personally rewarding and intellectually productive participant observation I conducted took place at the New York City Dyke March. The March was held only two weeks into my fieldwork, and I had yet to develop close relationships with anyone

at LHA. On the subway train to midtown Manhattan, where I would meet up with tens of thousands of marchers, I spotted a familiar face from the Archives. I caught K's eye, smiled and waved. She unraveled the Lesbian Herstory Archives banner rolled up in her arms- I had seen her working on it earlier in the week- smiled, and said, "so, what do you think?". An hour later, as crowds descended on Bryant Park waiting for the march to begin, another Archives intern spotted me. Looking relieved she jogged towards me and thrust a five-inch stack of flyers my way. "Do me a favor and pass these out during the march?" I took the flyers, but before I could utter a "sure!" she had turned and was disappearing into a circle of bare breasted hoola-hoopers. After several hours of sweaty marching, chanting, and elation at the sense of community I had experienced that day, the march route ended and women and queers and protest signs and dyke drum corps poured into Washington Square Park. It was here that I ran in to Jackie Orr, my dissertation advisor! Worlds collided!

That day, as I passed out flyers inviting people to come and check out the Lesbian Herstory Archives, I witnessed such a wide range of reactions- some told me how much they loved the LHA and shared stories of past events attended there, while others glanced down at the flyer, shrugged and moved on. I even heard one or two incredulous, "that place still exists?" While these reactions are indeed "data," and certainly figured into my research questions and analysis in interesting ways, it was the abstract sense of community that I experienced that day that really stood out to me. It also enabled me to better understand my research participants when, inevitably, nearly every single one of them cited the Dyke March while discussing experiences of community in our interviews. My observations and experiences that day helped me to truly understand, on an

emotional/bodily level, the concept of imagined community, a concept introduced and explored in the following chapter.

My archival research included not only an exploration of the records documenting the history of the organization itself, but also of the archives' holdings. I began my research at LHA with a broad and deep exploration of the Archives' collections. I read through binder after binder of finding aids to get an overall sense of all that the space contained, and I made my way through a large portion of the photograph collection which consists of a diverse mix of amateur photos donated by lesbians from all over the country and world, and professional photos taken by one of the several photographers serving on the Coordinating Committee over the years. Amateur photos in the collection document gatherings of friends, music festivals, days on the beach, and romantic moments between lovers. Some of the professional photos document the history of the LHA itself: the ribbon cutting at the opening of the new Brooklyn home, poetry readings and other events hosted in the Archives space, and family dinners served at Joan and Deb's apartment in Manhattan- the original home of the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Notably, these amateur and professional photos not only share space, but are interspersed in the large filing cabinets that contain them. In addition, I sat at the dining room table listening to audio recordings on cassette, tethered by my headphones to a bulky tape player. One tape contained a recording of a slideshow presentation given by Joan and Deb to a room full of lesbians in Washington D.C. in the mid-seventies, and another contained the recording of an interview between Joan and Mable Hampton- Joan's childhood caretaker, turned closest friend, and an absolute institution at the Lesbian Herstory Archives until her death in October of 1989. I wandered room to room on each floor, opening doors and drawers,

touching and experiencing the lesbian past- a large political button collection, t-shirts with witty slogans, framed photographs, and musical instruments.

While this unfocused exploration was essential in introducing me to the Archives' collection, the bulk of my archival research was relegated to one small room at the top of the stairs on the second floor- the archive of the Archives. Here, I meticulously went through folder after folder, each dated and marked with the contents. I read through decades of correspondence, discovered detailed financial records, came across copies of last will and testaments, and happened upon hundreds of flyers advertising events sponsored by LHA over the years. The contents of the archive of the Archives provide invaluable information about the history of the organization, its aims, and its actual practices, but the (dis)organization of this collection also contributed to my understanding of how a volunteer-run, community archive works⁶.

Data collected from this archival research includes thousands of photographs of archival material, as well as hundreds of written pages of researcher notes. Finally, textual analysis of the many materials, some paper and others digital, is central to this project. For example, nineteen Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletters were produced between 1975 and 2004. Each newsletter was coded, analyzed, and used to provide historical context to my contemporary observations and analysis. Additionally, the Lesbian Herstory Archives has a strong web presence, including an organization website, and active use of various social media platforms. These virtual spaces are important sites of community definition

⁶ The answer is that it works *nothing* like an institutionalized, professionally run and maintained archives- a point of great pride from some, and one of immense frustration for others involved in the Archives day-to-day operations.

and interaction, and an analysis of these spaces provided yet another layer of insight into the relationship between the archives and community.

A wide array of data points allowed for a multi-layered approach to exploring community at the Lesbian Herstory Archives. For example, I was able to compare the public face of the organization as imparted through their official website and organizing principles with the stories and perspectives shared in interviews. I was then able to further contextualize points of convergence and divergence through an exploration of archival materials. An additional layer of public response to the organization as seen through social media provided an even more nuanced understanding of the complexity of LHA and its role in wider LGBTQ communities.

Methodological Reflections

My first experience in an archive took place early on in my graduate school career. I was working on a project for a class, and the Cornell University Human Sexuality Collection became my second home that semester. Only, it didn't really ever feel like home. Like most institutionally based archives, the Rare and Manuscript Collections (which house the Human Sexuality Collection) does not necessarily elicit warm and fuzzy feelings. Even accessing the library building can be intimidating as you make your way up a winding hill onto the Ivy League campus. Once you've located the collection on the basement floor of the library (not an easy task), you must pass through a security checkpoint where you show photo identification and leave any belongings in a locker. An archivist who brings one box at a time to the researcher waiting in the reading room coordinates all engagement with the materials, serving as a gatekeeper of sorts. I took to calling the reading room "the fishbowl" as it is a fully glass enclosed room set up in front of the archivist's main desk.

Much like the panopticon, even without another person in sight, you still feel like you're being watched, every movement monitored.

While the collection is open to the public, it is highly unlikely that anyone would wander in off the street to check things out. In fact, dropping in without setting up an appointment is discouraged due to restricted access to some materials. The website for the collections states, "If you are planning a research visit, we recommend requesting the materials two weeks prior" (rare.library.cornell.edu). The website also assures that any email requests for information will receive a reply within one business day. The collection is open for researcher use Monday through Friday, 10:30-4:30PM, so if you work a typical nine to five job, your opportunities to use this resource are severely limited.

My experience with the Cornell Human Sexuality Collection is not unique to me, or to this particular archive. In fact, many scholars have written similar accounts of accessing institutionally based archives (Stone and Cantrell, 2015; Beins, 2015). However, I've taken the time to share this experience here because it greatly influenced my introduction to the Lesbian Herstory Archives. In the spring of 2013 I hopped on a bus to Penn Station in Manhattan. I was on my way to the Lesbian Herstory Archives, up to this point an unknown yet highly anticipated lesbian promised land, to do some exploratory dissertation research. I was going in without any institutional connections since my earlier emails to the organization had gone unanswered, and I was nervous. I took this lack of response from the LHA as reluctance to welcome a researcher whose focus was not the archives' holdings, but instead the organization itself. On Saturday morning, I left my hotel room extra early and made my way to Park Slope Brooklyn. I easily found the address, 484 14th Street, but used my phone to double and triple check that I was in the right place. From the

street, it seemed as though there was nothing to set this brownstone apart from any other brownstone on the block- no sign, no colorful flag, nothing. Ultimately, it was the wheelchair lift at the front of the building that confirmed that I was in the right place. I remembered reading something about the epic battle LHA waged and won in order to secure the city's approval to install the wheelchair lift in order to make the space accessible.

After knocking and waiting at the locked front door for a few minutes, the door swung open. A petite, dark haired young woman stood before me, "Can I help you?" I'm sure I must have stuttered my reply, "Yeah, I'm..I'm here to see the Archives," my voice raising at the end as if to form a question. The young woman stepped aside and motioned for me to come in. "Help yourself, look around. If you have questions...I'm not sure how much help I'll be". At this point I was torn between turning right around and walking out the door and wanting to explore the floor to ceiling shelves of books, framed photographs and wall art before me. My excitement beat out the nerves and I stayed. I stayed for the next three hours, wandering from room to room, delicately touching book spines, flipping through binders of finding aids, and cradling framed photographs in my hands as if they might shatter at any moment. I carefully shuffled through filing cabinet after filing cabinet of subject files, and I even self-consciously tiptoed past the young woman and into the kitchen that smelled of fresh coffee and also doubles as the home of the video collection.

After exploring each room on the first floor I looked up at the wooden staircase- am I allowed to go up there? Should I ask? I did end up asking and received the quiet woman's approval. I slowly ascended the staircase, viewing the posters and artwork lining the walls as I took each creaky step. At the top of the stairs I could see several closed doors, and one

open door that led to a very dark room. After unsuccessfully groping for a light in the first room, I tentatively tried the doors to a couple of other rooms- one led to a small, dark closet chock full of boxes, and the other led to yet another dark room where I could just barely make out more stacks of boxes. Without a set of detailed instructions and firm rules in place, I stood awkwardly in the hallway for a minute before making my way back down the stairs into the light of the living room-turned-library. A few minutes later, after calling a quiet “thank you!” to the young woman whose head was bent over something at the dining room table, I left the building. On the short walk back to the metro I replayed the experience in my head, vacillating between “well, that was terrifying,” and “that was exhilarating”. I assured myself: tomorrow, I will ask someone to turn on the lights. And maybe I’ll ask for a list of rules.

Fitting (in) at the Archives

Luckily for me, my first visit to the Archives was also the most awkward and disconcerting. Once I learned the ropes and settled in as a regular presence, I started to notice how well I fit there- not only that I felt a sense of belonging and connection to others in the space, but also that my body felt comfortable in the space, and that this feeling of bodily comfort was new for me. Sarah Ahmed theorizes feelings of comfort and discomfort in relation to the existence of queer bodies in a heteronormative world, arguing, “to be comfortable is to be so at ease with one’s environment that it is hard to distinguish where one’s body ends and the world begins. One fits, and by fitting, the surface of bodies disappear from view” (2004:148). On the other hand, the affective experience of discomfort causes “one’s body [to] feel out of place, awkward, unsettled” (Ahmed, 2004:148). Drawing on Ahmed’s discussion of discomfort, Beins (2015) points out, “queer

bodies in particular, through their failure to reproduce norms, do not “fit” into the spaces they inhabit” (p.33).

As a fat, gender non-conforming, female-bodied individual, it is rare that I feel bodily comfort in any environment. In fact, I am typically painfully aware of my body, of how it moves through and fits or does not fit in space, of how others around me view and judge my body. I have often wondered how much more productive I would be, how focused I could be, if I could forget my body, even if for a few moments. My summer as a researcher at the Lesbian Herstory Archives offered a glimpse into what that might look like- what it might feel like. I was able to lose myself in my research because at times, I could let go of my body, or perhaps I could fully embrace it. These reflections on my feelings of fitting, of feelings of comfort at the Archives, made me even more in tune with the fact that not all bodies felt this way in the space- that brown bodies or more sexually ambiguous bodies might not experience this same sense of ease and belonging, and this in turn made me more determined to try and understand the dynamics of power and exclusion within the space of the Archives.

Presences and Absences

While I was able to interview individuals across a variety of age groups and roles at the LHA, my sample is racially and socioeconomically homogenous. The vast majority of research participants identify as middle class, white, and have either obtained an advanced degree, or plan to do so. The socioeconomic homogeneity of my sample is the product of an organization that was founded by, and continues to attract, highly educated, middle class individuals, however the racial homogeneity of my sample bears further exploration.

Without making invisible the subjectivity and contributions of participants of color, I

believe that it is important to point out that this dissertation project tells the story of the Lesbian Herstory Archives through a homogenous perspective in terms of race, class, and education, thus failing to truly challenge dominant structures of power and knowledge (Hill-Collins, 1990; Mohanty and Alexander, 1997).

For example, though there are three Black women on the LHA Coordinating Committee, only one of them participated in my research. A family emergency prohibited my interviewing another Black Archives coordinator, and the third denied my request for an interview outright and without explanation. The lone voice of one Black woman in my research presents a serious limitation for a project that seeks to interrogate inclusions and exclusions, belonging, and (in)visibility within a community archives. While I obtained truly rich data from my one Black-identified participant, it is essential to remain transparent about this fact and to examine the implications for this lack of representation of women of color voices, particularly for a project that aims to be inclusive and intersectional methodologically and analytically. This also requires thinking beyond the black/white dichotomy and considering what racial diversity and inclusion in an organization might look like.

When Shawnta agreed to an interview she knowingly became the one Black voice, speaking for and about a predominantly white institution, to a white researcher, and from our conversations it became clear that this was a position Shawnta had occupied many times before. It is vital to reflect on the ways in which my own identities, in this case my whiteness, played out in the methodological decisions made and not made, the invitations to participate accepted and declined, and the analytical traces picked up and those left unexplored.

Deliovsky reminds us, “a/symmetries of power between researcher and the researched are inscribed with race and gender dynamics that are not always discernible, yet have a tremendous influence on data gathering” (2017:1). I imagine my whiteness, my queerness, and my assumed femaleness impacted not only who felt comfortable sitting down for an interview with me, but also the contents of those discussions- perspectives and observations readily shared, as well as those left unspoken. Looking back, I regret that I did not look outside of LHA to local lesbian of color organizations in order to get a better sense of how LHA was or was not serving queer women of color, this time not from an internal source, but an external one. In the following section I reflect further on my own embodiment, desire, and subjectivity and on the countless ways that I, as a researcher, leave my mark on the empirical findings delivered and the theoretical analysis offered throughout this dissertation.

(Be)longing

In the same way that a sense of comfort and belonging allowed for me to forget my body at times, feelings of desire and longing always served to bring me right back into myself. Tweedy (2016) loosely defines desire as it pertains to the research process: “it is a fundamentally embodied feeling that includes wanting, needing, imagining, and even despairing, that motivates us through our complex and intensely personal research endeavors from start to finish” (p. 211), and she recognizes desire’s multiple forms within the context of research: “the political and personal decision of which research project to pursue, the intellectual curiosity needed to commit to a project over time, the pleasurable flow of desire between myself and research participants, and even moments of discomfort” (p. 210). Tweedy argues that to distinguish between intellectual and erotic desire within

research is especially challenging, as “the embodied experiences of these desires are not easily separated” (2016:211).

It is easy for me to write about intellectual desire. I came to this dissertation project out of a personal desire to connect to a lesbian past that in many ways I claim as my own. I felt a political commitment to make visible the continuing success of a lesbian archives community nearly half a century old. I chose to conduct my research at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, in part, because I longed to experience fully the pleasure and magic of the space that I had read about in first-person accounts of the LHA. In preparation for my research I imagined myself building relationships with lesbian elders who would share their wisdom. I wanted, and maybe even needed, to occupy a space surrounded by other queer people like me- people who inhabit, appreciate, and desire queer bodies. Here, without intention, I start to move into the realm of erotic desire, and this is arguably much more difficult for me to write about.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives, as a space and as an archival collection evokes erotic desire, and it does so intentionally. Co-founder Joan Nestle was adamant about creating a space where lesbian sexuality and desire was centered and celebrated. Hence, the amount of materials specifically documenting lesbian sex is impressive. The collection of pulp fiction “survival literature” is celebrated as “some of the only depictions of lesbian life and sex from the 1930s to the 1960s” (www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/tourcoll). If you walk through the hallway on the second floor you can’t miss a large, realistic, beige-colored dildo mixed in with a colorful button collection. A large poster on wall in the dining room depicts two women kissing, open-mouthed, tongues tangled. The Lesbian Herstory Archives is a sexy place.

The first time I met Deb Edel, cofounder of the LHA, I felt a pull of desire deep in my gut. This surprised me for several reasons: first, Deb is certainly old enough to be my mother, in fact, she could be my grandmother, and second, Deb is pretty butch and I tend to be most attracted to queer femininity. Despite this, I found myself blushing when Deb spoke to me, and I hung on to each and every word that came out of her mouth when we did speak. I thought she had really beautiful lips. I found myself back in that place that was quite familiar to me as a child watching beautiful women on television- do I want to be her, or do I want her? Over the next several weeks I would return to this question several times as I sought to sort through my desire. I ended on this: I could both want to be her *and* want her.

Arguably, desire, both intellectual and erotic, can serve to move a project forward, build connections between researcher and participant, and perhaps most importantly, it can help to bring forth a certain kindness and generosity in the researcher as they complete their analysis. I explain this further in the next section.

The Push and Pull of Intergenerational Research

In her book, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order*, Kate Eichhorn writes, “It is important to consider the political efficacy of being in time differently, that is being temporally dispersed across different eras and generations” (2013:x). This experience of being in time differently is particularly potent for those whose research finds them enmeshed within an archive, and interviewing across generations. Much like Arlene Stein, “I find myself torn between the conviction that the development of lesbian culture and identity is of utmost importance and the fear that categorization can easily become a prison” (1997:3). Throughout my field research and the writing of this document, I have

experienced the push and pull of being “temporally dispersed across different eras and generations,” and I have felt what at times feels like competing loyalties to these different generations.

My very first interview with an Archives elder introduced me to this push and pull that would become familiar over the next several years as I completed my research and the dissertation took shape. A discussion of the Archives founding and early years led to the topic of lesbian separatism. As the interviewee described the impetus for a separatist politics, I found myself nodding along with her, feeling empowered by the prospect of an intentionally woman-only space, something I had never personally experienced. As I found myself being caught up in the narrative of this small but determined group of lesbians and their fight for visibility and space, my own radical politics of inclusion and personally complicated relationship to the identity of woman fell by the wayside. It wasn't until I shifted the discussion directly to questions of exclusion and the first arguably trans exclusive statement was uttered that I snapped back into myself and my role as radical activist researcher, and out of the role of awestruck, baby dyke, fangirl. I continued to waver between these roles for the duration of my fieldwork.

This push and pull persisted as I returned to my interviews- transcribing, coding, and writing up my analysis. As I sit and write this now I continue to grapple with the question of how to honor, respect and love my interview participants and the LHA as an organization, while offering a pointed and nuanced critique of a romanticized and universalized community that relies on often too rigid identity categories and exclusions. I am constantly reminded of my promise to submit the dissertation and all research materials to the Archives for inclusion as a special collection, and I feel panicked at the

thought. Mostly, I just don't want these people who I have grown to respect and love, to be hurt by my research. And I'll be honest; I don't want them to be angry with me. I return here to the idea of desire discussed in the previous section. I believe that the intimacy between researcher and participants that develops as a result of desire and longing, can serve to rein in a researcher and keep them from harsh criticism that doesn't take into account all of the complexities of the situation. In other words, it helps the researcher practice what Stein (2001) calls critical empathy, or "trying to understand the interaction between personal biography and social context that informed my interviewees' opinions without necessarily agreeing with them" (p.230). In this way, I don't feel like my love for my research participants and my loyalty to the LHA is a detriment, instead, I believe it to an asset. A sometimes-painful asset, but an asset all the same.

In the following chapters, you'll see this critical empathy at work as I introduce the Lesbian Herstory Archives as a site for the formation and sustaining support of (some) communities. Chapter three, *the Aging of the Archives*, is central to this process as it serves to both historicize and contextualize the organization, offering a framework to understand the importance of lesbian identity and culture to the LHA. Chapter four, *Contested Communities*, raises some challenging questions, highlighting where the Lesbian Herstory Archives fall short in serving *all* lesbians, and calling into question the utility of the category lesbian all-together. Finally, chapter five, *At Home With the Archives?*, explicitly outlines the LHA's many contributions to individual lives and entire communities.

CHAPTER THREE: THE AGEING ARCHIVE

I'm sitting at the dining room table listening to a 1980 cassette tape recording of a Lesbian Herstory Archives slideshow presentation given to a room full of women in Washington D.C. My fingers still on the keyboard in front of me—I stop transcribing the tape, close my eyes, and listen. Joan and Deb are received with joyful cheers and thunderous applause. Through story and photograph, Joan introduces the room to lesbians from the fifties and sixties. Somehow, through the hiss and fuzz of outdated technology and a bad microphone system, Joan's voice rings strong and clear: "This slideshow is a memorial. You will see pictures of women who are no longer with us. It's a slideshow about ageing. Most of all, I want it to be a slideshow about how we can put our family back together again." For a moment, I'm transported back to a time before I was born. I'm in that hot, crowded room, shoulders pressed up against others at each side. I'm on the edge of my chair, heart bursting with love for the women on the screen in front of me, many of them long dead, and for the women beside me, so full of life and longing. A long, loud belly laugh drags me back to the present—back to this dining room table in the year 2013 where several young women sit working. One sorting through a box of special collections materials, another typing away furiously at a computer, and still others sitting in the adjoining room leaning close together and laughing. I feel suspended between the past and the present, held comfortably there by the women who have come before me, and by those who will surely be here after I'm gone.

This first research chapter serves to introduce my principal site of inquiry, The Lesbian Herstory Archives, "a living, breathing artifact that keeps lesbian cultures and identities alive" (Narayan, 2013). Here, I aim to paint a picture of the particular socio-political moment that the Archives came into being, thus providing a useful comparison point as we consider the ways in which the organization has changed over the course of forty plus years.

Drawing upon feminist and queer approaches to temporality and ageing, I consider what I refer to as the ageing of the archives. The ageing of the archives framework includes the evolution of the Lesbian Herstory Archives from its humble beginnings in a Manhattan apartment to a more institutionalized three-story brownstone in Brooklyn, New York, and it highlights the changes brought about by the shifting political climate, the institutionalization of the organization, and the opening of LHA to the public. It also refers to the physical ageing of the archives' founders and early archives collective members, as

well as the wider lesbian-separatist and feminist community that the Lesbian Herstory Archives originally sought to engage. Finally, this framework considers the ways in which an identity, or multiple identities, age and are impacted by socio-political shifts. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to both entangle and unravel the following threads: an ageing organization and movement, ageing individuals, and ageing identities. Relatedly, this chapter explores the role of intergenerational connection at the Lesbian Herstory Archives and draws on feminist critiques of the generation model to interrogate the effectiveness of such an approach. Through this chapter I seek to better understand the relationship between ageing, narratives linking generations and progress, and how this contributes to the invisibility of lesbian lives and history.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives: Storied Roots

The Lesbian Herstory Archives (hereafter, LHA or the Archives), now located in Brooklyn, New York, is the oldest and largest lesbian archives in the world (Strock, 1992). LHA, established by a small group of lesbian-separatists in 1974, was a response to what was seen as a rapidly disappearing lesbian culture (Nestle, 1998). In the first Lesbian Herstory Archives newsletter, the collective defined their mission and goals:

The Lesbian Herstory Archives exists to gather and preserve records of lesbian lives and activities so that future generations will have ready access to materials relevant to their lives. The process of gathering this material will also serve to uncover and collect our herstory denied to us previously by patriarchal historians in the interests of the culture which they serve. The existence of these archives will enable us to analyze and reevaluate the lesbian experience in order to formulate our living herstory. (Lesbian Herstory Archive Newsletter, no. 1, 1975)

Departing from traditional notions of the institutional archive as a site for merely excavating past histories and lives, and safely stowing away the artifacts of the long dead for posterity, the Lesbian Herstory Archives aims to create a communal site where memory

and history live and breathe, where self-identified lesbians can come to touch and hold their individual and collective present and past.

To further describe the founding of and political commitments of the Lesbian Herstory Archives it is essential to understand the socio-political landscape out of which the Archives were born. Though the experiences of lesbians prior to the 1970's vary greatly across time and culture, an overarching theme is that pre-1970's lesbians in the United States often lived in isolation and secrecy. There is a letter in the LHA collection that was written in 1932, addressed to the author of a book called "Homosexual Life". The letter writer asks the author for advice regarding how to meet other women "of this class": "Is there any way in which I could become acquainted with women like myself? Could you tell me of some doctor who makes study of this sort of thing who might help me?" (*The Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter* 19, 2004). Twenty years later, though many lesbians may have had an easier time finding one another, they were still largely required to keep their relationships a secret, often times at the expense of developing truly intimate partnerships. One of the earliest Archives Collective members, now in her mid-seventies, recalls her experiences in the late 1950's and 1960's:

I remember how many women I knew that had died alone. And particularly suicide, I mean, suicide being big. But a brain aneurism, and not being found for a week or more... 'cause they were disconnected from their families, their biological families, and if you did not have a partner and you lived by yourself and you don't want people to know where you come from and you don't even tell them your real name and you barely pass on phone numbers sometimes, you know, that's rough. When your sexual partners are ones that you've met in a bar and you have fake names that both of you are using...but even if I was Judy to them and they were Rebekah to me, they came to my apartment because I had a space and we made love and they left and I did not even have a phone number sometimes. (JS, personal communication, August 7, 2013)

While the 1970's were by no means a magical turning point ushering in the free and open love for all lesbians, some significant changes did take place.

The late 1960's and early 1970's in the United States were rife with social and political upheaval: Anti-Vietnam protests exploded across the country, the Black Power Movement had found its stride, feminist activists from every background demanded change, and gays and lesbians came together in never-before-seen numbers to stake a claim for equal rights under the law (Hall, 2011). As is the case with so many U.S.-based social movements, New York City was at the epicenter of many of these struggles (Kaiser, 1997). New York City saw the proliferation of both the Radical Feminist Movement and the Gay Liberation Movement, the roots to the family tree that we now call The Lesbian Herstory Archives.

In keeping with its radical feminist origins, LHA committed to total transformation of the archive as an institution, seeking to completely redefine what constitutes history, and whose histories matter. From its earliest days, the coordinators⁷ of the Lesbian Herstory Archives maintained that ALL lesbian lives were important and worthy of documentation, and they vowed to accept "ANY materials relevant to the lives and experiences of Lesbians". The LHA was designed to operate as a non-hierarchical collective, "with decisions being made by consensus" (*The Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter 1* 1975:3). Finally, reflecting its ties to Radical Feminism, the Archives was founded as, and remains to some degree today, a separatist organization where some collections are only available to women⁸ researchers, and where men are not welcome to participate in the overseeing of the organization⁹ (D. Edel, personal communication, July 10, 2013).

⁷ Coordinator is the organization's title for those responsible for decision-making and day-to-day operation of the LHA.

⁸ Currently policy at the Archives emphasizes self-identification.

⁹ The separatist roots and current day policies will be discussed further in chapter four: *Contested Communities*.

The founding of LHA was inspired by the Radical Feminist Movement, not only through identification with the movement and its politics, but through disidentification¹⁰ with the movement as exclusionary of lesbians and other women who did not conform to the standards set by the movement. In an interview with Maxine Wolfe, a long-time coordinator at the Archives, she recalled experiencing conflict in various feminist organizations: “I had...tried to start a Lesbian Action Committee and what it ended up doing was bringing out all of the homophobia of the straight, socialist feminists who were there...and eventually pushed us out of the organization” (personal communication, July 25, 2013). Another early coordinator, Judith Schwarz, remembers having similar experiences at feminist academic conferences:

We were put in the smallest rooms. Always. The lesbian panel or lesbian presentation....people would stand, not only out in the hallways, they would be outside listening through the windows. I don't know how many people were there, but I swear, nobody was in the other sessions at the moment. The [lesbian panels] were so powerful and so interesting...It was just unbelievable that they were so disrespectful of the interest that was there. (personal communication, July 25, 2013.)

These experiences cemented the need for a space that was distinctly feminist *and* lesbian, where lesbian identities would not only be visible, but celebrated.

The late 1960's in the United States saw a series of uprisings taking place from coast to coast, sparking what has become known as the Gay Liberation Movement. In 1966 at Compton Cafeteria in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco, street queens, transsexuals, gays and lesbians picketed in protest of local police harassment of trans individuals frequenting the restaurant (Stryker, 2008). Just a few years later, the more famous Stonewall Riots occurred at the Stonewall Inn located in Greenwich Village, New York City,

¹⁰ Here I draw on Astrid Henry's formulation of José Muñoz' disidentification (1999) as “identification against something,” where one's identity is created in relation to the refusal of a particular identity. (Henry, 2004:7)

where transgender folks, gay men and lesbians, similarly, stood up to police harassment and unfair laws (Duberman, 1994). These and other clashes are credited with the organization of a gay and lesbian community that would go on to produce countless individual organizations addressing a multitude of concerns.

Whitter writes, “Social movements are not distinct and self-contained; rather, they grow from and give birth to other struggles, unite in coalition, and lock in conflict,” (1995: 157) and this was certainly the case for the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Though born of the liberation movements of the 1960’s and 70’s, the Archives carved out a space that was both and neither a gay liberation organization nor a feminist organization. In 1973, a small group of lesbian feminists sought a room of their own¹¹ after meeting at the first conference of the Gay Academic Union, a national network of college and university academics seeking to “promote and disseminate research on homosexuality and gay people” (Lesbian and Gay Academic Union Records, Coll2011-041, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, USC Libraries, University of Southern California). Finding the conference to be gay male-centric, several attendees formed a consciousness-raising group where the seed that would become the Lesbian Herstory Archives was sown. Remembering the origins of the Archives, co-founder Deb Edel said,

We had been part of the Gay Academic Union and we had realized how clearly the men just didn’t get it. They didn’t get it. And we were tired of being the addition. Oh Gay Academic Union. I guess there’s some lesbians, oh lesbians too! But it was never the Gay and Lesbian Academic Union¹² (personal communication, July 10, 2013)

¹¹ The wording here refers to Virginia Wolf’s 1929 feminist essay, *A Room of One’s Own*.

¹² In the early 1980s, GAU changed its name to the Lesbian and Gay Academic Union (LGAU) (Lesbian and Gay Academic Union Records, Coll2011-041, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, USC Libraries, University of Southern California).

As Adrienne Rich, a lesbian feminist poet and supporter of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, put it: “Lesbians have historically been deprived of a political existence through ‘inclusion’ as female versions of male homosexuality. To equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatized is to erase female reality once again” (Rich, 1986:52). Thus, experiences of homophobia within the Women’s Movement, and sexism within the Gay Liberation Movement demonstrated the need for a space where lesbian feminists could “rediscover our past, control our present, and speak to our future” (*The Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter 1* 1975:1).

Co-founder Deb Edel describes the early 1970’s as an exciting time where “people were just putting their feet into the waters of gay and lesbian history.” Despite a growing number of individuals interested in documenting gay history, those focusing specifically on the lives of lesbians were few and far between. In fact, when the Archives was founded, its members set out to “collect the world,” because as far as they knew they were the only organization preserving lesbian culture (personal communication, July 10, 2013). Bonnie Morris speaks to this point in her book, *The Disappearing L: Erasure of Lesbian Spaces and Culture*: “The work undertaken by many remarkable individuals required lonely and unseen effort, faith in the importance of what was being constructed, and the willingness to proceed without a cultural road map” (2016: 128). Hence, without the benefit of a blueprint for how to proceed in creating and maintaining grassroots, community archives, the original members of the LHA pressed on and laid the foundation for what is known today as the oldest and largest lesbian archives in the world, an archive and community organization that has served as inspiration and as a model for dozens of regional archives since.

The Ageing of the Archives

Although, when she is a child, Annie sings loudly and optimistically about the sun coming out “tomorrow,” by the time she grows into an old woman, she is expected to quiet down, keep out of the way, and contemplate the setting sun at the end of the day. –Cynthia Port (2012)

I, too, write as a woman, lesbian, and feminist; a dinosaur facing extinction in this new queer jungle. I’m writing now to describe what it looks and feels like to be written out of history. –Bonnie J. Morris (2016)

The Lesbian Herstory Archives provide an excellent site for the exploration of ageing, and in the following pages I consider how the process of ageing applies not only to individuals, the most common subjects of such investigations, but also to social movements and their cultural arrangements in the form of institutions and identities. Sociological and gerontological definitions of ageing consider how the biological, psychological and social come together to impact the lives of individuals and groups, as they grow older (Tulle, 2008; Sahoo, Andrews and Rajan, 2009). It has been argued that some individuals and some groups are more present than others in conventional investigations of ageing, for example feminist gerontologists have been quick to point out that while women make up the largest segment of the ageing population, they are often an afterthought in discussions of ageing. This is particularly true of those women who also belong to other marginalized groups (Cruikshank, 2013). The field of Gerontology is not alone in the erasure of ageing women; within Feminist and Women’s Studies, discussions of ageing are largely altogether absent. Cruikshank, author of *Learning to Be Old: Gender, Culture, and Ageing* asks, “Why are old women missing persons in women’s studies at a time when nearly all of its founders are over sixty-five?” (2013:186). And what of non-heterosexual ageing women? Krainitzki (2016) points out that not only are discussions of age and ageing lacking in feminist theory

and literature, but within lesbian communities, as well. She writes, “sexism, heteronormativity and ageism intersect, creating multiple sites of invisibility” (p. 634).

Contributing to this invisibility is the fact that the process of ageing is often linked to decline: decline of the body, the mind, and productive capabilities within society. Cynthia Port (2012) argues that this notion of decline serves to connect experiences of “queer subjectivity and the condition of old age”. She writes:

No longer employed, not reproducing, perhaps technologically illiterate, and frequently without disposable income, the old are often, like queers, figured by the cultural imagination as being outside mainstream temporalities and standing in the way of, rather than contributing to, the promise of the future... And like queers, the old have projected onto their bodies that which normative culture fears and represses within itself: the knowledge of eventual bodily failure and mortality.

In her book, *Agewise: Fighting the New Ageism in America*, Gullette explains that in a society that values youth, the assumed link between old age and decline serves to legitimize the cultural imperative to dismiss the ageing population in order to shift focus to the young (2010). Here, youth is associated with progress, and this process is taken as both necessary and the natural order of things.

One could argue that this phasing out of the aged to make way for the youthful does not only apply to ageing individuals, but to ageing identities as well. Progress narratives are applicable beyond the discussion of ageing individuals and can broadly applied to social movements and their associated identities. McBean claims, “narratives that imagine feminism as moving linearly through time are also proscriptive about what feminism’s proper objects of study should be. They frequently link progress or loss with ideas about the “correct” or “incorrect” objects of study or analysis” (2016:7). In this way, identities of “woman” or “lesbian” become subjects of the past while “trans” and “queer” identities are deemed proper subjects of the present, marking progress. Morris writes of this phenomenon in *The Disappearing L*: “Scholars of today’s prevailing feminist theory and its

adjunct queer theory, call for questioning of all categories, disrupting gender binaries, halting separations; and women have been a casualty” (2016:16). She explains further, “By 2000, anything woman-identified had become proof of unthinkable allegiance to a retro gender binary. Women gathering together to affirm a shared lesbian identity? Once cutting-edge radical, such events were now accorded the counterrevolutionary tang of a prefeminist bake-off” (2016:10-11).

Morris writes convincingly of the link between ageing individuals and identities, and the subsequent invisibility of lesbian individuals and disappearance of lesbian culture and identity. A fate she herself is experiencing as an ageing lesbian individual and lesbian-feminist scholar and activist. For Morris and many others, the personal is truly political. Morris expounds,

For veterans of a certain kind of lesbian activism, who poured time, energy, and resources into sustaining alternative spaces when other doors were closed to us, the triumph of civil rights is a bittersweet victory if our tremendous efforts and contributions are to be written out of the record. The fearless Amazon generation that built an entire network of lesbian music festivals, albums, bookstores, bars, presses, production companies, publications, and softball teams is teetering on the brink of oblivion, just grey-haired enough to be brushed aside with an impatient “good riddance” by younger activists, yet too recent a movement to enjoy critical historical acclaim. But the majority of middle-aged lesbians who came out in the 1970s and ‘80s are neither at death’s door nor silent; in fact, more lesbians are able to live and speak freely in plain sight than ever before. Instead, what we’re experiencing is a semantic phasing out; a threefold dismissal of the word, the female aspect of lesbian identity, and the recent cultural history of lesbians are all vanishing faster than a magician’s handkerchief. (2016: 20).

Here, Morris questions this notion of progress. Progress for whom? To what end? While Morris mainly writes about the lesbian-feminist music festival scene, as you’ll see below, her account has striking similarities to the trajectory of the LHA; certainly, these were parallel struggles to build and sustain lesbian culture and community. In the following pages, I consider the process of ageing at the Lesbian Herstory Archives more specifically.

From its establishment in 1974 to 1993, the Lesbian Herstory Archives was located on West 92nd Street in Manhattan, sharing the home of co-founder Joan Nestle. At first, donations of items to be archived trickled in slowly, and much time and energy was put into convincing the average lesbian that her life was important and that her letters, t-shirts, and poetry, her stories of pain, joy, and survival, should be preserved and made available for future generations of lesbians. In a 1979 edition of the Lesbian Herstory Archives News, Joan Nestle urges:

We ask every Lesbian woman to participate in weaving this tapestry of Lesbian life. We ask for a sign: a letter, a drawing, a photograph, a voice, a song in all the languages we speak. The women in the Archives collective have undertaken the responsibility of collecting the published material but we know the vast greater power of the waiting words, the voices who think they have nothing to say and yet live the strength and beauty of our culture every day. We ask for moments of self-cherishing. (1975:1)

This campaign for the recognition of every lesbian life was successful, and before long nearly every wall was covered and every room in Joan's apartment was taken over with the artifacts of lesbian life, making it more a vault of everyday queer desire than a domestic dwelling. Early descriptions of the space describe kitchen cabinets spilling over with ephemera, the pantry "filled with documents in every nook and cranny" (Cvetkovich, 2003: 240-241). As Joan Nestle writes, "Every inch of the apartment was touched by "lesbian dreaming" (Cruz-Smith et al., 2016).

In these early days of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, a closely-knit group of lesbian women did the work of building an archive, creating community, and re-defining family. "We formed a real sense of community. Almost a family...We had a sense of an amazing, close working relationship but also deep friendship" (D. Edel, personal communication, July 10, 2013.) A relatively elaborate familial naming system was used by the early archives collective, and while the collective sought to eschew hierarchy, this system indicated a sort

of ordering of individuals based on both their role in the organization and their age. Joan and Deb, the archives' founders were 'Mom' and 'Pops', other collective members were 'Aunt' to younger and less involved women who called each other 'sister'. To this day, you see these familial terms in the comments on the photos of various archives collective members that have been posted on Facebook: "lookin' good Aunt Judy!" A 1976 Archives newsletter says it best: "The Archives is both a Library and a family album; an attempt to preserve our living experiences beyond our generation and reconnect with our family of the past" (*The Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter 3* 1976:1). The use of the family metaphor to describe feminist and lesbian feminist communities at this time was not limited to the LHA community. In fact, Henry (2004) calls it a "ubiquitous phenomenon," where "writers of all ages, feminists and non-feminists alike, were describing feminist intergenerational relationships in familial terms". Henry argues that this suggests, "there is something to be gained by turning feminism – and often feminists- into "mothers" ...it emboldens feminism's "daughters" granting them authority and a generational location from which to speak" (pp. 2-3).

According to Moore et al., "LGBTQ people are a minority that exists both interdependent with and independent of the biological family. Therefore, each generation faces the task of inventing a life for itself, often without the help of family or extended relations" (2014:2). For those present in the early years of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the invention of a life for themselves was inextricably bound up in their relationship to one another: their chosen family. The creation of an Archives' family is discussed by many of my interviewees who attribute such a community to the need for self-preservation, and as the alternative to isolation and self-loathing. Interviewees and lesbians from across the

country writing in to the Archives speak of biological families lost as a result of their queer identities, and it is clear that many saw the wider lesbian community, and the archives community more specifically, as an alternative and affirming family, a place to trace their lesbian ancestry. The following poem written in the Archives' visitors log in 1983 blurs the line between lover, mother, and ancestral guide:

*I am here among women
Who breathe softly in my ear
Who speak gently
In a voice that will not be stilled.
I am here in a cradle
Or a womb
Or a lap,
On a knee that is shapely
Under my thigh
Leaving the impression
That I will never be alone.
I am here to remember faces
I have never seen before
And I do.
Love, Jewell Gomez*

This tightly knit Archives family congregated, worked, and played in an actual home. Thanksgiving and Passover dinners, as well as birthday celebrations, took place around the same table where periodicals and photographs were logged and given accession numbers. In a 1979 interview, Mabel Hampton, an Archives elder and Joan Nestle's own childhood nanny, describes the Archives' early days: "down here [at the Archives] it was just like two couples, Joan and Deborah and Mabel and Lilian; and we got along lovely, and we played, we sang, we ate, it was marvelous! I will never forget it" (*The Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter* 11 1990:4).

In April of 1986, with the four walls of the Manhattan apartment bursting with the collection, the Archives Coordinating Committee announced a campaign to raise money for

a new home. In that first year, through fundraising events as well as individual and group donations, around nine thousand dollars was raised towards purchasing a permanent home for the Archives. Over the next several years the fundraising intensified and donations flowed in steadily. By 1990 the Building Fund held over fifty thousand dollars and members of the Coordinating Committee began searching in earnest for the future site of the Lesbian Herstory Archives. The following year, having raised a total of \$174, 013 “with the help of the lesbian community worldwide”, LHA purchased a four-story brownstone in the Park Slope area of Brooklyn, New York (*The Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter 13* 1992:3).¹³ As much of a triumph as this was, the purchase of a new, permanent home for the Archives marked an important change in the “life course”¹⁴ of the organization, and the transition was not without its growing pains.

Each of the early Archives Collective members that I interviewed noted a dramatic change in the current day Archives community from that of the past, and many spoke of missing their old Archives family. One interviewee said:

It was a much tighter group. It was a much bigger group. I put up a video that a friend of mine gave me the other day, and it's of the gay pride march 1990, and it features the entire Archives group, which was huge! It was huge! It was one of the biggest women's groups! Now there's maybe five or ten women, you know? It was a much tighter group, it was a much bigger group. Our level of working was much more intimate because you had to sit around the table to do it, you know? So you're stuffing envelopes, you're having a conversation, you're filing stuff, you're having a conversation, you're doing stuff, you're tired, you go out for dinner afterwards. Now it's via email. Don't get me wrong, I applaud the possibilities of email, but it changes the interactions. (S. Scheffer, personal communication, July 26, 2013)

Saskia points out a seeming contradiction here: the earlier Archives community was at the

¹³ Much attention is paid to the dollar amounts raised as this fundraising momentum was extraordinary for the time, and I believe it points to a great degree of community engagement that remains central to the success of the Lesbian Herstory Archives. More on this in Chapter 4.

¹⁴ I use the concept of the life course here to enhance the metaphor of the Archives as an ageing institution.

larger, but at once more intimate. More members shared closer ties.

Several of my interviewees locate the beginning of this changing community in the move to the archive's own space in Brooklyn, and to the subsequent opening of LHA to the public. One interviewee said:

Moving created many big changes because instead of us all being there on the same night we all started staffing individually. We needed to figure out how to be a public place because in Joan's we were not and so after moving we let people in. Once we got the house we were considered a commercial establishment...it's changed. (M. Wolfe, personal communication, July 25, 2013)

Minutes from a 1995 Coordinator's Meeting indicates that members of the committee were concerned with the organization's transition from Joan's apartment to the Archive's own space, and agenda items for an upcoming retreat largely focused on dealing with this transition (LHA, archive of the Archives, October 18, 1995 meeting minutes). We can ascertain that the Coordinating Committee was able to successfully navigate the transition, as the Archives remains functional to this day. However, there was consensus among the long-time Collective members that I interviewed that the move truly did change the organization's dynamics. My interviewees describe the shifting relationship between Archives members as a move from intimate, personal, and often sexual relationships, to professional, working relationships. Interestingly, the original archives members were very conscious of how important that feeling of home and family was. Before moving to the new space in Brooklyn the decision was made for the top floor of the building to serve as a caretaker's apartment; coordinators wanted the archives to always exist in someone's home. It's important to note, of course, that the difference between sitting and working at someone's kitchen table with chicken cooking in the oven and just knowing that someone lives two floors above you is quite vast. The latter doesn't necessarily evoke the same feelings of intimacy.

Others echoed this sense of a more disparate community and expressed their waning emotional engagement with the Archives, while still acknowledging their commitment to the organization and its mission. Maxine Wolfe said, “There’s a bifurcated sense of community which I think is that people definitely feel the commitment to the Archives but less of the people are friends outside of the Archives” (personal communication, July 25, 2013), which for some causes a sense of being ‘stuck.’ Again, evoking the metaphor of family, cofounder Deb Edel admitted with humor, “I just want to figure out how to disengage in some ways. I feel like I created an institution, it’s like having a kid who won’t leave home, you know?” (personal communication, July 10, 2013.). This and other changes in the Archives community present interesting challenges for the future of the organization, a fact that is not lost on those involved.

A lessening of wider community support for the projects and upkeep of the organization, particularly in terms of funding, has accompanied the diminishing sense of community felt by the coordinators and others closely tied to the Archives. Several years ago, the coordinating committee sent out another round of fundraising letters in an attempt to raise money for an endowment fund that would insure the security of the Archives indefinitely. The same tactic that had proven so successful and had mobilized lesbian women across the country in the mid-eighties fell flat. One interviewee said:

A few hundred dollars. That’s it. Asking people to do the same things: have house parties, do this, do that. It didn’t have the same power. There wasn’t that same kind of understanding of urgency. There are too many other organizations and right now there’s no money. Nobody has any money. (D. Edel, personal communication, July 10, 2013)

Others pointed out that the lack of financial support as well as lower attendance at Archives events is also likely due to the sheer volume of options that lesbians or queer-identified folks have for places to socialize and to give of their time and money. In the early

days of the Archives it really was one of the very few places for lesbians to go *and* to give.

Morgan Gwenwald, an LHA coordinator for over twenty years, recalls a time when the Lesbian Herstory Archives banner, carried in a plethora of parades and protest marches, was often the only banner with the word “lesbian” on it. The banner served as a beacon: “All sorts of lesbians joined us around that banner, whether or not they even knew about the Archives. The banner let us look for each other and mass together in the streets” (Smith-Cruz et al., 2016). The LHA banner which boldly claimed, “In memory of the voices we have lost,” remained a symbol of lesbian visibility and community for decades.

Gwenwald relies on the symbol of the banner to reflect on the changing role of LHA in a shifting socio-political landscape:

Now, in 2014, the number of lesbians assembling with the LHA banner has decreased, as there are now many more groups also relevant to lesbians and queer women represented on the streets. Now when I look at the banner I see the motto in different ways. One aspect of the motto reflects the Archives’ ongoing work in restoring to our community the voices we have lost and reinforces the sense of having an important voice in bringing about social and political change. But, with what was once a yearly reunion for us on the last Sunday in June¹⁵ now fading, and as those carrying the banner find ourselves hemmed in between the corporate-sponsored groups that have begun to dominate the march, I cannot help questioning whether the voices we have lost, and are losing, may be our own. (Smith-Cruz et al., 2016)

Here, Gwenwald notes a loss of community due to diminished community engagement and the existence of alternative organizations catering to lesbians and queer women, but she also points to the mainstreaming and corporatizing of LGBTQ identity and community as responsible for the loss of lesbian voices, specifically the voices of ageing LHA constituents—a topic I return to later in this chapter.

¹⁵ Morgan refers here to the LHA’s participation in the annual New York City Pride Parade, held on the last Sunday in June each year.

While there can be no doubt that a suffering economy and the ever-growing number of organizations that compete for queer folks' limited resources has something to do with this waning engagement with the archives, I also want to consider the possibility that these alternative organizations might offer something else: more fluid understandings of identity, and expanded notions of who belongs. In other words, perhaps the Lesbian Herstory Archives, which represents a very particular socio-political moment- early post Stonewall, gay lib, separatist lesbian feminism- no longer feels like home for many queer-identified folks who feel as though the Archives do not make space for their multiple, fluid identities. After all, as discussed in the introduction to this section, lesbian as a fixed identity has aged as well. Krainitzki (2016) writes of "the move from the identity 'lesbian' to the more gender neutral 'queer'" arguing that this is "indicative of the disavowal of identity politics in favor of queer theory in a post-identity world" (639-640), the same process that Morris claims disappears women and lesbians. I will return to this matter in the next chapter, *Contested Communities*.

It is important to note that not all changes associated with the move from Joan's 92nd Street apartment to the Brooklyn brownstone were negative. Polly, a former coordinator, points out that along with a larger space to hold the collection, the move to Brooklyn brought on a change in the Collective's decision-making process, increasing the number of people who had a say in the direction of the organization: "When I arrived there it was pretty much Joan and Deb and Judith making the decisions. They were the coordinators. We were trying to fundraise for a new building and that involved getting the participation of a wider group of people." Laughing, she added, "We expanded the coordinating committee to include, you know, almost anybody who walked in the door...And then with

that we started these coordinator meetings that still endure, and decisions were made more publically and collectively like that” (P. Thistlethwaite, personal communication, July 24, 2013). Archival materials indicate that in 1984 there were three Archives Coordinators: Joan Nestle, Deb Edel, and Judith Schwartz. These women, now in their late sixties and seventies, represent the first generation of LHA constituents. Less than ten years later, by the 1993 opening of the Brooklyn Archives location, there were seventeen Coordinators (LHA, archive of the Archives, Reopening Celebration program). These new, often younger Coordinators, now in their forties and fifties, represent the second generation of LHA constituents. The move to Brooklyn not only opened up LHA’s governance to a wider range of individuals, but the new public space ensured that a greater number and more diverse range of individuals would have access to the Archives’ holdings on a regular basis. One could argue that the move, in effect, democratized the Archives and limited the potential gatekeeping that might come along with housing a community Archives within the home of one or two community members.

While the move to Brooklyn and the opening of the Archives to the public is considered by many of my interviewees to be responsible for these and other changes in the structure and overall feel of the Archives, the topic of wider societal change and the effects of greater visibility and acceptance of gays and lesbians in the United States on the Archives is raised time and time again. Some of the Archives original members recall LHA being *the* place to go for lesbians in New York City and the surrounding areas in the 1970’s and early 1980’s. If lesbians wanted to spend time with other lesbians outside of the bars, their options were limited. LHA provided one of the few alternatives: “It was a place where lesbian cultural workers, singers, writers, poets, filmmakers, without having their work

valued or judged, could come and present in that way” (D. Edel, personal communication, July 10, 2013). Beginning in the mid-1980’s this changed, “there were so many more places now where people could go. And so many more public places for people to read their work and show their work and do their work...12 million bars you could go to to dance!” (D. Edel, personal communication, July 10, 2013). Saskia, another long-time coordinator, agrees, highlighting the cultural shift to greater acceptance in the mainstream:

Right now, you can go anywhere in New York ...since there’s all this acceptance, but you can be a lesbian anywhere in New York and live pretty much okay, not have a big problem, you can find places to go, half the time you can’t even tell, you don’t know who’s a lesbian anymore- it used to be kind of different. (S. Sheffer, personal communication, July 26, 2013)

During one of our conversations, Deb wondered what this new societal tolerance means for the Archives,

[Previously], too often the lesbianism part was written out of people’s lives that way. You know, that’s changing. The number of times you can read now in the newspaper, so and so and their partner... it’s in the Times and it’s in obituaries. Even in small towns now I see it. You know, and so that’s all changing and maybe someday we won’t need to continue the archives. (personal communication, July 10, 2013)

Similarly, Morris (2016) sees the mainstreaming of LGBT identity reflected in the media’s shifting representation of lesbians: “For better or worse, the stereotype of the angry radical lesbian marching with fist raised against the patriarchy has been replaced by the embossed wedding invitation for Megan and Carmen.” She continues, “This shift... idealizes lesbians’ participation in the American dream: settling down with a partner, marrying a beautiful wife, raising children, being active in the local school PTA and church community. It’s a wholesome, nonthreatening participation in middle-class values by women who just happen to be gay” (p. 20). Morris understands this as contributing to the devaluing of and increasing invisibility of radical lesbian culture, history, and politics: “Vanishing from this landscape are the many large-scale gatherings once typifying dyke subculture, where

talking points included some very tough critiques of church, state, family dynamics, and military imperialism” (2016: 21). This is a more pessimistic view, but it aligns with Deb’s speculation that perhaps one day there wouldn’t be a need to continue the Archives.

Morris might instead argue that one day it would be *impossible* to continue the Archives due to a lack of interest from an assimilated and normalized lesbian community.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives is not the only lesbian feminist organization to face this particular problem. In fact, such loss of support became so common that it prompted lesbian historian and cultural scholar Bonnie Morris to ask, “Do lesbians value lesbian culture and history?” Morris explains, “In quite a few cases, lesbian businesses, bookstores, presses, and festivals went under when lesbian consumers stopped supporting them- not deliberately or vindictively, but in significant enough numbers to break the bank” (2016: 192). Morris cites several causes for this change, but ultimately, like many of my interviewees, points to the mainstreaming of LGBT identity as the principal culprit (2016:194).

The first and second generations of Archives coordinators that I spoke with recognize that while the world around them is morphing, and while the LHA adjusts to reflect a shifting society, they too are changing: they are ageing. Saskia, a longtime coordinator puts it into perspective, “I have been a lesbian longer than the interns have been alive” (S. Scheffer, personal communication, July 26, 2013). She spoke of the “urgency and intensity” that comes with youth, explaining:

Life was entirely different then, you know? For starters, we were all much younger and things were much easier in terms of energy, physical ability, you know, staying up late, chasing women around, finding your inspiration there, all of that stuff. Maybe some of us still do that but not all of us. Um but the world was different then and there was a much different need for that. (personal communication, July 26, 2013)

For some of the older archivettes the shift in roles from collector of history to the source of history for a younger generation, now a third generation of Archive constituents, is a surprising one; one that they are still working to come to terms with. “The hardest part is to realize that I’m the one handing over the information instead of the one receiving it” (S.Scheffer, personal communication, July 26, 2013). It is now their own lives and histories in need of preservation.

A lot of institutional knowledge is disappearing...There are not that many of us around to hand over that information...we need to do our own oral histories, you know? And they’re not even done interviewing the people who are way older than we are, and they are, some of them are on their way out. They’re not well (S. Scheffer, personal communication, July 26, 2013)

Shawnta, a second-generation coordinator in her thirties considers this: “What do we do when the sisters fall at once? That is something I’m not prepared for” (S. Smith, personal communication, July 28, 2013). Shawnta feels the enormity of the task before her. As the first generation of archivettes age, fall ill, and pass on, it is up to the second generation to pick up the torch and carry on the mission of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, passing on knowledge and skills to the third generation of archivettes- today’s young interns, volunteers, and coordinators.

Joan Nestle, one of the original founders of the LHA, is currently working on a book that gathers and reflects on memories of the Archives’ early years. This fact alone speaks to a shifting consciousness around the Archives as a one-time site for the preservation of lesbian history turned historical artifact, serving as a snapshot of a particular moment in time. Joan’s latest project can be considered the final gift, in a long line of gifts and service, from one generation of Archives members to the next. Overall, there seems to be a sense of urgency to collect and record the experiences of the organization’s elders as well as the history of the organization itself as the reality of ageing sets in.

Intergenerational Communication

The Archives must never be a dead place, a worshipping of the past, but it must show its connection with the Lesbian present, with the struggles and glories of each Lesbian generation. We have never had the chance before to listen to a full generational discussion, to argue with or refine the visions that worked for one age but not another. (Joan Nestle, The Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter 5, 1979)

“The notion of the generational is integral to discussions of ageing, (Krainitzki, 2016: 635), and according to Mannheim, “the sociological phenomenon of generations is ultimately based on the biological rhythm of birth and death” (1952: 278). Beginning in the 1990’s, it became increasingly common to think and speak of feminism within the context of generations (Henry, 2004), hence the association with entire groups of feminists and their cultural creations coming of age, growing older, and dying out. Mannheim (1952), one of the first sociologists to theorize generations, presented two models for understanding generations and generational conflict: the positivist and the romantic-historical models. “In the former, each successive generation is seen to go beyond that which came before it: a new generation is equated with progress. In the latter, the past is romanticized and idealized” (Henry, 2004: 5). It is the romantic-historical model that prevails at The Lesbian Herstory Archives.

At the Lesbian Herstory Archives we can identify three distinct generations, spanning three protest cycles of the LGBT movement, as defined by Ghaziani, Taylor, and Stone (2016). The first generation, made up of the founding and earliest members of the Archives, came of age during the gay liberation/lesbian feminism cycle of the movement. According to Ghaziani, Taylor, and Stone, this cycle embraced a politics of “sexual difference,” challenging the “strategies of respectability,” embraced by the earlier homophile movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s (2016: 168). During this cycle, emphasis was placed on coming out, visibility, and the growing of gay and lesbian communities.

Visibility politics were taken up by lesbian feminists who “created distinct women’s communities through music festivals, theaters, conferences, art, journals and small presses, record companies, and other businesses” (Ghaziani, Taylor, and Stone, 2016:169). And of course, an archive. They also created an archive.

The second generation of archivettes came of age during the movement cycle Ghaziani et al. (2016) call “queer activism”. Largely a response to attacks from the religious right, the lack of response to the AIDS crisis, and critiques of gay liberation and lesbian feminism as inclusive in name only, queer activism was characterized by “militancy and flamboyant defiance” (p.170). Organizations such as ACT UP, Queer Nation, and the Lesbian Avengers were born and spread chapter by chapter across the United States. Queer activism influenced, and was influenced by, academic queer theory which locates oppression in restrictive identities, hence supporting an “anti-identity stance that sought to destabilize collective identities” (p. 171).

The third generation at the Archives, volunteers and interns in their twenties and thirties, coincides with the marriage equality movement cycle. According to Ghaziani, Taylor, and Stone, unlike the previous two movement cycles which are characterized by sexual difference, the marriage equality cycle is characterized by assimilation and “strategic articulations of sameness” (2016:172). Those in their twenties and thirties have grown up in a (western) world where legalized same-sex marriage was not only a possibility, but an inevitability. They’ve grown up in a world where pride parades have corporate sponsors, and grandmothers watch Ellen dance on her talk show at four o’clock each afternoon.

I don't suggest here that each individual at the Archives fits neatly into a discrete movement cycle. There are myriad examples that prove this to be false. Co-founder Joan Nestle, for example, came out as a lesbian in the butch-fem, working class bar community that predates gay liberation and lesbian feminism. Early Archives member Judith Schwarz experienced lesbian community first with the Daughters of Bilitis, a homophile organization also predating gay liberation and lesbian feminism. Maxine Wolfe, for years, navigated her involvement with both lesbian feminist and queer activist organizations like ACT UP and Lesbian Avengers. I will argue, however, that coming of age during a certain political moment does influence our experiences and our understandings of the world around us, hence, creating unique opportunities for learning, as well as tensions, between generations. These differences in perspective become increasingly evident in the proceeding chapter as interviewees both define community and determine its boundaries.

Since its founding in 1974, the Lesbian Herstory Archives has maintained a commitment to intergenerational exchange. An archive, as a general rule, must at some point prepare for and consider future generations and their use of and engagement with records preserved, for what is an archive if not a collection of items and documents deemed worthy and necessary of preservation for the future? As stated in a 1978 newsletter, "The Lesbian Herstory Archives was created in 1975 to preserve our past, to recognize the need of all Lesbians for a voice in the present, and to ensure generational connection in the future" (*The Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter 4* 1978:3). In interviews with past and current Archives members, and through thirty years of newsletters, the significance of establishing connections between generations is clear. As one intern in the mid-nineties pointed out,

In many ways, lesbian culture is not something that is readily available. I have had to seek it out, and at the same time, I have had to find it within myself. It is not reproduced in a family unit the way an ethnicity or a religion is; its social mores and regulations are not found in a holy book; it is not even something that is experienced consistently among people who participate in it. Lesbian culture, for me, is something that I learn as I talk to the women that have come before me and have laid the foundation for the road to freedom, and as I listen to their stories and tell them mine. (The Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter 16, 1996)

Co-founder Deb Edel echoes this notion. She explains:

Gay men had a tradition they called pillow talk, where an older generation of men would share through...through sex but also through the intimacy that grew out of those relationships, the history of the community. So there would be this passing down, in essence, from the equivalent of grandfather to grandson, if you will, and the lesbian community didn't have a parallel. And in some ways, a family, gathers its own family history, you know? (personal communication, July 10, 2013)

The original Archives members saw this lack of a system for passing down lesbian community history and worked to fill that gap through the creation of the first lesbian archives in the world¹⁶. Valerie Taylor, poet, activist, and Archives supporter wrote,

So all of us build on the lives of those who have gone before. Today we think in terms of sisterhood- and that's productive. But when a writer reaches sixty, she also begins to look for daughters, for inheritors. We hope that our work too will help to make a foundation for those who come after us. We hope that young women coming up...will go on where we leave off...We are planting a seed here. (The Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter no. 17, 1999)

Not unlike the unnamed intern, or Deb in the earlier quotes, Valerie invokes the trope of family, highlighting the role of intergenerational exchange as a tool for sustaining community history. Furthermore, in recognizing the function of the traditional family in imparting important community wisdom and history to younger generations, those at the Lesbian Herstory Archives determined to bridge that gap for younger lesbians, and in this way fashioned a distinctive form of queer family.

In addition to the commitment to imparting lesbian culture and history to younger generations, the LHA Statement of Purpose declares, "Archival skills shall be taught, one

¹⁶ In the interest of avoiding the desexualization of lesbians in general and of those at the Archives more specifically, I would like to point out that my interviews and archival research uncovered many examples of what Deb refers to as 'pillow talk', or the coupling of cross-generational mentorship and sexual intimacy.

generation of lesbians to another, breaking the elitism of traditional archives”

(lesbianherstoryarchives.org). This guiding principal has been institutionalized through an internship program that was established at the Archives in the nineties. Through this program, individuals-whether affiliated with an institution of higher learning or not-are matched with an elder or coordinator and work on a particular project of interest to them, while also assisting with the day-to-day operation of the Archives. The internship program does the important work of spreading the word about the Lesbian Herstory Archives to young people all over the country who might otherwise never know such a place exists. Most of the current interns I spoke with were introduced to the organization for the first time through information about the program provided by a college professor or seen on a popular queer ‘lifestyle’ website such as autostraddle.com. While the program ensures that interns learn valuable archival skills such as filing, processing collections, curating exhibits and organizing community events, interns, elders, researchers and other visitors to the Archives highlight the exchange of cultural knowledge and history that takes place, which as Maxine points out, “always comes up in a very organic way” (personal communication, July 25, 2013).

Interviews with Archives elders revealed that at times they wondered if the younger interns were interested in their history, and whether they actually understood the significance of it all. One second-generation coordinator told a story about working with a twenty-one-year-old intern and how as they worked with the photo collection she spoke constantly to the intern telling stories of each person in the photographs, pointing out their connections and contributions to the local lesbian community. She wondered if the intern “hated this with a passion,” only to later find out that the intern spoke in an interview about

how much she loved and appreciated those times working on the photo collection (S. Scheffer, personal communication, July 25, 2013). This specific example seems to represent a trend. Many interns that I spoke with enthused about the importance of their interactions with the first and second generation elders, and how much they cherished learning from them. One intern-turned-coordinator said,

I've learned an almost freakish amount just by being in a room with some of these women. I could have spent hours and hours and hours, hundreds of hours researching and not learned just as much about it as just by osmosis. Max will come in one day and just tell everybody a story about ACTUP and the Lesbian Avengers. (Lena, personal communication, July 24, 2013)

In addition to these organic interactions between interns and elder coordinators, interns are often able to connect with donors whose collections are housed at LHA: "The most fun thing for me recently was when I got to write to this lesbian whose papers I'd processed and I'd learned so much about her and I could just be like, hey, I learned so much about you and about lesbian herstory, thank you!" (Courtney, personal communication, July 19, 2013). These are the kinds of interactions that might never happen if not for a multigenerational community space like the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

My research reveals that third-generation interns are not the only ones longing for and finding connection to their queer elders at the Lesbian Herstory Archives. One visitor in her early twenties expressed her desire for a mentor and a connection to the queer past:

I don't know any gay people who are older than me... I desperately, desperately want there to be, I want to meet my older gay mentor woman, and I haven't. And so where I go for that is history books. That kind of sense of being connected to people like me in the past, I think is potentially a really important thing the Archives do. (Mai, personal communication, June 18, 2013)

Another visitor, Julie, thirty-two, thinks back to the days when she first came out as a queer woman and the loneliness and isolation that she felt at that time, "What I wanted so badly was a mentor. Like an older dyke mentor... I wanted a dyke mom" (personal communication, August 12, 2013). Even folks dropping in for a quick day visit or a two-day

research trip recognize the potential of the Lesbian Herstory Archives to satisfy this need for connection. Violet, thirty-two-year-old doctoral student describes her experience visiting the Archives for research,

I got to meet Teddy, who offered me cookies and lemonade. We talked about my work as a contemporary circus performer and I momentarily felt like I had a lesbian dream life where there are multiple generations of women around talking and preserving our communities through story. (personal communication, October 5, 2013)

For Violet and others, the intergenerational community one finds at the Lesbian Herstory Archives is truly the stuff dreams are made of. This aligns with Mannheim's romantic-historical approach to generations (1952).

While the language codified in the LHA Statement of Principles and the words used casually by Archives interns, researchers, and visitors sometimes suggest a unidirectional current of knowledge from an all-knowing elder to a blank and receptive younger individual, my research found that this flow of knowledge about community and culture as well as skills used in the Archives is multidirectional. One past coordinator articulated, "Whenever you work with somebody elbow to elbow, ideas flow one way or another. So, to suggest that it's only a one-way transfer is faulty" (P. Thistlewaite, personal communication, July 24, 2013). In fact, my use of the term "mentor" was challenged as a hierarchical term that some of the coordinators just didn't relate to. "I see myself as a coworker who just has more experience, and my goal basically, first of all, is to get the work of the Archives done, and also to pass the skills on of archiving" (M. Wolfe, personal communication, July 25, 2013). During my research at LHA I found that interns not only brought a lot of useful skills surrounding technology and social media to the table, but they were constantly bringing their knowledge of and experience with newer forms of identity

to the organization, sometimes challenging the elders' more static understandings of sexuality and gender.

Intergenerational (Mis)communications

Images of heat and spark have always served to symbolize shifts in leadership; think of that other fire-based metaphor, the passing of the torch-presumably, to a next generation. What does it mean if that next generation is disdainful of the torch, welcomes its dousing, or lacks the data or the will to learn how it was lit and carried forward in the first place? - Bonnie Morris (2016)

Intergenerational exchange, while often a source of inspiration and connection for old and young alike, can be fraught with conflict. In her book, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order*, Eichhorn writes of the "generational debates" surrounding the feminist movement: "...older feminists dismissed younger feminists as politically naïve and thereby either unaware of the need for long-term institutional change or oblivious to *their* histories of struggle; younger feminists complained that the so-called "second-wavers" were simply "behind the times." (2013: vii-ix). This somewhat accurately depicts the issue at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, as revealed through my interviews with first, second, and third generation Archives members. First and second generation members expressed the belief that the younger generation of lesbians¹⁷ tended to be apathetic, deradicalized, and lacking grounding in a historical understanding of the recent lesbian past. Several of these elders pointed to a changing society as the cause for the younger generation's disengagement with the radical politics of the seventies and eighties. Older Archives members recall a time of isolation and outright discrimination, where to be secretly queer was unbearably lonely, but to be openly queer was dangerous. Back issues of the Archives Newsletter corroborate this, including "A PLEA FOR COMING OUT" (Issue 4, 1978) and

¹⁷ Here I refer to younger lesbians in general, not necessarily those involved with the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

promise in big, bold font that “ALL MATERIALS FROM THE ARCHIVES ARE MAILED IN PLAIN WRAPPERS” (Issue 8, 1984). Well into the 1990’s, women providing their contact information to LHA in order to serve as volunteers would leave their numbers along with the annotation, “discretion please” (LHA, archive of the Archives, moving volunteer form). As Morris (2016) points out, “In small-town America and most conservative states, sending lesbian-themed materials to a home address threatened women’s jobs, housing, child custody, military status, professional certification, probation and prison evaluations, church standing, school admission, psychological assessment, social workers’ reports, and actual physical safety” (p. 132).

One coordinator who has been with the Archives since the early eighties explained how these experiences fueled their activism: “It felt in a way, much bigger, what we were doing then. And there was much more anger. I am sorry to see that the anger has disappeared because we need it! We need it!” (Alice, personal communication, July 9, 2013). Saskia, another second generation elder in the organization agrees,

The need and the victory that you had every time you achieved something was so much more intense. I don’t give a shit about gay marriage. I am against all marriage...and you know, we think that we, because we can marry that we are there, it’s so not true. That is just so not true! You know, and who on earth said we just wanted to be like everybody else? I’d rather die! God, listening to myself! (laughs) (S. Scheffer, Personal Communication, July 25, 2013).

While such a stance is often deemed revisionist nostalgia, Morris reminds us,

It’s important to distinguish between false nostalgia for actual and brutal inequality, and nostalgia for creative ways we risked being out and proud in homophobic society. Our golden days are marked by the inevitable separatism that stemmed from being unable to vacation as a lesbian couple anywhere but a lesbian festival or lesbian-owned bed and breakfast; from being unable to find books on lesbian lives and history anywhere but on the shelves of an independently run feminist bookstore. Shut out of mainstream institutions, we formed our own (2016: 196).

For Saskia, the third generation, not having had the experience of fighting for the basic right of visibility and recognition, and not having experienced the oppression of the past, has become complacent: comfortable with the status quo.

Despite what some of the elders in the organization may believe, some members of the youngest generation at the Archives¹⁸ are not unaware of the differences between their own and past generations, and they don't necessarily disagree with the older generations when it comes to the topic of complacency. One woman in her late twenties used the Dyke and Pride Marches to illustrate the transformation between the 1970's and present day. She explains that many of the elders no longer attend the marches because while in the seventies there was a very tangible activist purpose to the marches, contemporary Pride, even for her, is all about the party and socializing with your friends, "Hi, I know you!" (Lena, personal communication, July 24, 2013). While aware of the deradicalized nature of her generation, Lena doesn't appear to be in a rush to change anything. Others, however, are. In the 2004 Archives Newsletter a twenty-three-year-old intern wrote an open letter to others of her generation warning them not to become complacent,

To all my sisters who long for other times, for other birthdays and other histories than the ones they've been given, to all my sisters who have heard the tales of our mothers and lovers, who have read the history books both hidden and displayed, who have seen the photographs and felt their hearts race with an unnamed longing for meaning, for purpose that great, I am telling you, these are the times of great change. These are the times of danger- don't be fooled. (Issue 19, 2004)

My many conversations with those in the youngest generation, at least those involved in the Archives, reveals that they are invested in lesbian and queer politics, and they are in awe of the women who have come before them. Lena, an intern turned coordinator in her mid-twenties explains:

What's really changed the way I think about the history of feminism by being here is the fact that there are still people alive who come in the door every day and it's not really this thing that I can compartmentalize as something that happened before. I think women who come here of a certain age who were around when it was in Joan's apartment, there's a way in which they interact

¹⁸ It's important to note that these young people affiliated with the Archives are not likely representative of all or even most lesbian and queer-identified individuals their age. They have sought out contact and connection with LHA and hence we can assume that they have some particular interest in lesbian culture and history.

with the space differently, and they have a different understanding of the space and almost a different...they feel a sense of ownership. (personal communication, August 7, 2013)

Another third-generation intern, Courtney, told a story of attending the Dyke March as a representative of the Archives and inviting several of her gay male friends to hand out LHA flyers with her. Later, when one of the Archives elders told her that in the future she should not have male-identified friends marching and handing out flyers for the organization, Courtney was embarrassed by her oversight, “Oh wait. Right. Why didn’t I...I think I was being careless” (personal communication, July 19, 2013). I don’t believe it was carelessness that led to this incident, but rather a difference in context held by Courtney and the elder. Courtney’s experience as a young queer woman in her early twenties did not lend itself to concerns around identity and separatism in that moment. My findings support Eichhorn’s (2013) claim that the younger generation of feminists “were and continue to be invested in both the future and the past, albeit not in a way that easily grafts onto a previous generation’s investments in futurity or history” (ix).

Often in an attempt to understand and classify cross-generational experience and intergenerational exchange we tend to simplify and universalize the experiences of the various groups and individuals involved. In her book *Feminist Generations*, Whittier outlines the myth of the postfeminist 1980’s arguing that this myth relied on two assumptions: first, earlier feminist activists, having passed out of the excess of youth, abandoned their radical politics in pursuit of “more mature and traditional goals and priorities”, and second, that the 1980’s heralded a time less restrictive of women, and therefore without need for feminism. According to the myth, this shift in the socio-political landscape caused a great generational divide between older activists of the 60’s and 70’s, and the younger, more free women of the 80’s. Acknowledging that all myths have an edge

of truth, Whittier maintains that while a generational divide between young and old did emerge, “this divide was neither absolute nor based on the younger generation’s wholesale rejection of feminist values” (1995: 3).

Whittier goes on to argue that “Women who came of age in the 1980’s had sharply different experiences from those who came of age ten or twenty years earlier...they redefined priorities and reconceptualized the meaning of feminism” (1995:4). I would argue that those in the third generation at the Archives, the Courtney’s and Lena’s of the organization, have similarly redefined and reconceptualized the meaning of lesbian in a way that better aligns with their experiences of the world- just as the second generation of Archive’s members had done before them. This reconceptualization does not necessitate, nor does it result in “the wholesale rejection” of the lesbian feminist values that serve as the foundation for the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

Besides leaving little room for cross-generational solidarities, to speak only of a generational divide assumes a universal intragenerational experience, and denies differences based on race, class, gender identity, ability, politics, and a plethora of other markers of identity and affinity. As Whittier points out, “veterans of the 1960’s and 1970’s movement are by no means a unified “generation”” (1995:4), and the same can be said for the earlier generations of lesbians at the Archives. The use of the generations model is not without merit; however, Henry reminds us, a generation is “an imaginary collective that both reveals truths about people of a particular age and tries to mold those people into a unified group. Even as we use the often-productive concept of generations, we may be wary of the ways in which it provides a reductive image of relationships between women, between feminisms, and between historical periods” (2004:6).

While assuming the existence of unified generations of individuals denies difference, similarly, to assume the existence of a singular, unified community serves to gloss over the complexities of both identity-based and politics-based communities. In the next chapter, *Contested Communities*, I consider the Lesbian Herstory Archives as a community archives, and turn to an exploration of community: its potential and its discontents.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONTESTED COMMUNITIES

The archive of the Archives spills out of several metal filing cabinets, unable to contain the enormity of a story unfolding over forty plus years. This story is told through event flyers, meeting minutes, newspaper clippings, quickly scribbled notes, letters and postcards sent and received, spreadsheets, and other markers of an organizational life.

Immediately, I'm struck by how the mundane so readily becomes the sacred, by how columns of numbers, small donations in five and ten dollar increments listed and added up to hundreds of thousands of dollars, can make my heart swell as I sit under the very roof those dollars conjured. Or how meeting minutes, most likely an annoyance for the individual tasked with documenting the gathering, can so vividly paint a picture of a bunch of dykes sitting around a table arguing about the day to day operations of the Archives. I can sense the exasperation, frustration, and sexual tension that doesn't make it in to the official record, but still underlies each word appearing before me.

The most powerful example of this is contained in a folder labeled "wills", unceremoniously squeezed between folders holding financial reports and photo releases. Inside are the last will and testaments of a dozen or more individuals who have named the Lesbian Herstory Archives as a beneficiary of their estates. Some have left EVERYTHING to the Archives. Reading between the lines of legalese I see the utter love and devotion these women had for an organization that some of them had never stepped foot inside. Days after I've moved on to other folders, other traces of the Archives' past, my thoughts keep returning to those wills, and I fight back the tears.

Contested Communities at the Lesbian Herstory Archives

And yet, somewhere along the way, despite our best intentions, the movements and communities that we create almost always end up marginalizing and excluding others who wish to participate. –Julia Serano

Community archives are often created out of a sense of exclusion from and/or misrepresentation in the histories commonly found in mainstream, institutionalized public archives. Within and across community archives, however, boundary drawing, (sometimes false) categorizations, misrepresentations, and exclusionary practices abound. Even the term 'community', a term central to our understanding of community archives, must be interrogated as boundaries drawn around 'communities' are often premier sites of categorical violence and exclusion. In this chapter I draw on both scholarly literature on

community and my interview data to define and complicate the concept of community.

Relying on conversations with those involved with the Lesbian Herstory Archives, as well as my own observations, I describe the LHA community and detail how this community is built and sustained. The fractured and boundaried nature of community is explored, and special attention is paid to how class, race, and gender operate as sites of potential exclusion within the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

Defining Community

"I think community is one of those terms I am like, scared of... 'cause it has so many different meanings. It's complicated!" (Archives intern, personal communication)

To what do we refer when we speak of "community" or a "sense of community"?

One need not be a community studies scholar to grapple with the many meanings and applications of community. My research participants constructed complex and nuanced definitions of community as layered and multifaceted, homogenizing, constructed, fluid, a place of refuge, idealized, fractured, and boundaried.

Community as Layered

Often, the same interviewee would describe community in seemingly opposing ways—community as the intangible, imagined affinity to others who one will likely never meet, and community as geographical space and physical proximity, an intimate group of individuals closely connected through work, friendship, and activism who spend countless hours together and have a deep understanding of one another. This seeming paradox points to the intricate, multi-layered nature of community recognized by my interviewees.

One current Lesbian Herstory Archives Coordinator explains the various layers of community like this: "So there's the community of women, then there's the community of lesbians, then the community of lesbian photographers, then there's my community, the

community of the Archives—the current community and the previous community...”

(Saskia, personal communication, July 26, 2013). Saskia goes on to explain these not as different types of communities, rather as different layers of community, each of which she experiences with varying degrees of belonging. This is reinforced by another interviewee, a visitor to the Archives who struggles to concretely define community before settling on the concept of layers:

I'm just thinking about the queers I know and if I feel like I'm actually in community with those queers. And I don't necessarily think that I am...umm...so as I think I'm redefining for myself what community means. If in defining community, it's a group of people that are interacting on a regular basis with a shared purpose or goal, then I don't know that I would necessarily have a queer community. Um...so maybe, I don't know if that changes my definition or if I'm just realizing that I don't have a queer community. Because I'm thinking about like how...I do feel community, so maybe there are different levels of community. Maybe there's like a broad community based on um...based on gender identity, based on politics, or based on, you know, and then maybe there's close-knit communities that are maybe more focused and...localized I guess. (Julie, personal communication, August 12, 2013)

Here, Julie comes to the decision that community is not simply either geographic *or* relational, but perhaps both. As these participant responses suggest, community scholars aren't alone in the struggle to describe community; however, the concept of layers provides a more flexible and dynamic understanding of community for those looking to make sense of their own experiences.

Community as Unity

Identity plays an important role in determining one's community. That is, by taking on a particular identity one often also takes on a corresponding community. One Archives Collective member explained,

It's not that simple as a common identity, but...I don't know quite how to define it. For some people, you would define it by ethnic identification or racial identification, for some people it's by social identification...but it creates a kind of world, small world within a larger world. That to me is community. (personal communication, July 10, 2013)

Each of my interviewees indicated belonging to a lesbian or queer community of sorts, though this belonging was typically complicated in some way. For example, one Archives member argued that identity alone was not enough to constitute community. One had to make meaning of that identity in relation to community:

Those who choose an existence or choose an identity that is focused on one aspect of themselves, it needs to permeate deeper than their singular existence. It can't just be like, oh, I like pussy so I'm gonna like wear a pink bag and walk in the streets and scream it out loud. I'm going to connect it to something really deep and larger than me. It goes so deep into me that it goes outside of me and it spreads, and if you've done the Dyke March and you walk and you turn your back and see the hundreds of women that are walking in the streets, that shit is magic. (S. Smith, personal communication, July 28, 2013)

Shawnta describes community here as a deep and spiritual connection that moves beyond basic identity or place-based affinity. This corresponds to later community studies literature that complicated the place and meaning formulation of community to include social structure (Lee and Newby, 1983; Fischer, 1982; Driskell and Lyon, 2002; Giesecking, 2013). Here, identity, meaning, and place come together to provide a more nuanced understanding.

Several interviewees indicated that identity-based communities, in this case the lesbian community, stands in for typical kinship based communities:

Gay people have a hard time keeping, or you know, have this process of forming community in different ways from other people. Because we're generally different from our families, you know. We're the queers; we break from our families so we don't have a family history to connect to, or a family legacy. Many times, our queerness forces us to lose connection with our ethnic and regional roots. So, in a lot of ways, queer community or queer identities can disrupt other sorts of communities. (P. Thistlethwaite personal communication, July 24, 2013)

While Polly recognizes the disruptive potential of lesbian or queer community as it stands in for familial community, Shawnta highlights the unifying potential of lesbian community:

Without a history...people have called the women here their ancestors, and then that's interesting to me because in my understanding of ancestral community, it's really a bloodline thing, but people have turned past lesbians into their own ancestors, and I

thought, that's brilliant! Because we are all one, we are all connected anyhow, and yes, these are the women who came before us, who've done these acts of strength. I mean, if you really dig deeper, you get the sense of really what community is and how it permeates in the walls of this room, you know? (S. Smith personal communication, July 28, 2013)

For Shawnta, the lesbian community serves as a powerful unifying force that empowers those who belong.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives were created and continue to exist because of a presumption of this collectivity called the lesbian community. We see the deployment of this in newsletters, public relations materials and in fundraising campaigns for the Archives. An article reproduced in a 1979 Archives newsletter states, "The Lesbian Herstory Archives are committed to making all this priceless material available to every lesbian who wants to use it. Thus, the lives of women who lived in different eras or cities or nations may touch each other. Individual lesbians and lesbian communities need never be fragmented or isolated again" (Lesbian Herstory Archive Newsletter, no. 5, 1979). This collective identity is often celebrated in Archives materials: "This summer brought a feeling of universal lesbian power—women united in the celebration and adventure of pursuing our identity" (Lesbian Herstory Archive Newsletter, no. 7, 1981). It is also used to mobilize fundraising campaigns: "The national and international Lesbian Community are our people, and we are making a people's appeal" (Lesbian Herstory Archive Newsletter, no. 9, 1986).

The rhetoric of community was and continues to be used deliberately and strategically by the Lesbian Herstory Archives. In my archival research, I came across multiple drafts of the same fundraising letters with each subsequent draft revealing slight changes that work towards the perfect, most powerful, language. These campaigns, particularly the early ones, worked! They worked so well that the organization was able to pay off the mortgage on a Brooklyn brownstone in less than four years. Generally, simple

rhetoric, no matter how powerful, is not enough to mobilize people. Using the language of community and appealing to folks' sense of belonging to a community is often not enough. In the case of LHA, it had to be received and *felt* by the intended audiences—lesbians throughout the United States and all over the world. The question remains, how were lesbians so geographically and culturally distant from Brooklyn, New York able to identify with the goals and aims of LHA so strongly that they were willing to send their money, their personal treasures and lifelong secrets to the Archives?

In an early attempt to understand the phenomenon of experiencing a sense of community, McMillan and Chavis outline four elements that must be present in order to provide one with a sense of community, one of which is the fulfillment of needs. My own research on the LHA points to the organization's success in fulfilling two very important needs for those identifying as lesbians: it provided a sense of membership and belonging, and therefore provided individuals with a sense of security. One woman wrote in saying, "The existence of the Archives tells me that in spite of every persecution the straight world can direct at us, we Lesbians are going to survive and be okay because we love each other far more than they will ever hate us" (Lesbian Herstory Archive Newsletter, no. 15, 1995). In this case, community is a means of survival, a sentiment echoed by several of the older members of the Archives that I interviewed. Judith explains:

We were so hard-hit. We had to fight so hard, you know, to get the little space that we needed...space being physical space, mental space, time, money, facilities. We had to, as a community, fight for every single bit of space. (personal communication, August 7, 2013).

Another long-time Archives Coordinator directly linked the existence of community to survival:

People always ask what community is and it's really hard to explain, but here's what I can say: before there were out lesbians there were many more suicides in East Lansing. You

know, so I think that from my own experience, community is a sense that there are people that have your back. Whether they have it or not...I can remember from the Women's Movement, you know, that women would walk down the street, like some guy would say something to them and they'd go, like, Fuck Off! You know, they had this sense that somebody was gonna come and help them. Was there really? No. But that sense, that empowerment feeling that you are a part of a collectivity. (M. Wolfe, personal communication, July 25, 2013)

It's important to note here that Maxine doesn't say that belonging to this collectivity of lesbians actually means that one is safe from harm. Instead, this protective community is *imagined*. Maxine defines community here as "a *sense* that there are people that have your back. *Whether they have it or not.*"

For many of my interviewees, community means feeling connected to other individuals that they have never met and are not likely to ever meet. In the words of Shawnta, "It's connecting to something larger than yourself...and to have a purpose that is bigger than your singular existence...connecting to other people in a way that is intangible" (S. Smith, personal communication, July 28, 2013).

Community as Imagined

In 1983 Benedict Anderson, a historian and political scientist, proposed the concept of the imagined community in order to understand the phenomenon of nationalism. Anderson argued that the nation is an imagined political community, socially constructed by those individuals who believe themselves to belong to said community. Anderson says that the nation is imagined "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1983: 6). Though Anderson's concept of the imagined community was geared specifically towards the study of nation and nationalism, it has been applied more broadly to other identity and affinity-based communities,

including communities based on sexual orientation (Ross, 2012; Formby, 2012; Blount, 2006). My own research points to the continued usefulness of this concept as we consider lesbian or queer collectivities as imagined communities.

Archives members speak to the importance of shared experience and culture in determining belonging to community highlighting that it does not have to go hand in hand with a shared physical space. One LHA intern explains, “[Community is] people I haven’t met but would feel a connection to. You know, people who share my experience- even if I haven’t met them...Sort of like if these people do meet they would understand each other really well” (Katie, personal communication, July 24, 2013). The Lesbian Herstory Archives as an organization is seen as a way to support such a spatially scattered yet culturally common community: “[The Archives] is a community itself and the most important part is that it is accessible by community members who aren’t like physically near all of the time” (Courtney, personal communication, July 19, 2013). In a 1993 newsletter, the LHA reminds readers that “Since the Lesbian Herstory Archives strives to serve the Lesbian Nation, and not just the Dykes of New York, its important you understand how to use the Archives from a distance. We may be located in New York City, but we do in actuality provide services to Lesbians the world over” (no. 14, 1993). This utilization of the term “nation” is particularly interesting when applying Anderson’s concept of the imagined community. Without regard to geographical boundaries or state-delineated confines, the notion of a Lesbian Nation is employed in the construction of an imagined, collective Lesbian Community.

To highlight the importance of the Lesbian Herstory Archives for lesbians all over the country, several interviewees turned to the story of Marge McDonald from rural Ohio who kept her sexuality a secret from her family, friends, and coworkers throughout her life.

Though she had never stepped foot inside of the Lesbian Herstory Archives Brooklyn brownstone, Marge included the organization in her will, donating her personal library, journals, and other items. When her family learned of this upon her death they attempted to block the donation and destroy the items. Marge's lawyer contacted the Archives and instructed them to come pick up the donated items as soon as possible. Archives members in New York City began calling contacts in Ohio looking for someone to help secure the donation. Eventually making its way through the lesbian grapevine, a phrase used by one interviewee, a couple of graduate students from The Ohio State University got word and set out on a road trip to collect the items. The donation was saved from destruction and eventually made its way to LHA where it continues to exist as a Special Collection and exhibit. This story, from beginning to end, is a powerful example of an imagined community. Marge McDonald, without ever meeting the women of the Archives or experiencing the physical space of LHA, felt that she was a part of the Lesbian Community that LHA sought to represent and serve through its holdings. The graduate students who made the journey to the home of a deceased stranger, where they faced her homophobic family in order to honor her wishes and preserve her existence as a lesbian woman, did so because they believed that they too were a part of this Lesbian Community. It is because of this sense of imagined community that we know the name Marge McDonald today. Furthermore, this account serves as an origin story of sorts, and contributes to the propagation of the imagined community.

For Anderson, imagined community is only made possible through the circulation of textual representation that becomes shared amongst the imagined community. The Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter, for example, served as shared textual

representation. Lesbians across the country could sit down-- together, though sometimes worlds away-- to read about the latest happenings at LHA, view suggested reading lists, and experience art and poetry with lesbian themes, all affirming their membership in an imagined community of lesbians. Imagined community, then, is “facilitated through the experience of simultaneity” (R. Hallas, personal communication, July 13, 2017).

Interestingly, while Marge McDonald was likely brought in to the imagined community of lesbians and the LHA through the newsletter, the Marge McDonald story now serves as its own cultural representation of the LHA. In 1994, a documentary about the construction of lesbian history called *Not Just Passing Through* was produced by Catherine Gund, Polly Thistlethwaite, Dolores Perez, and Jean Carlomusto. One segment of this documentary tells the tale of Marge McDonald and how the LHA came to possess her personal collections. This documentary, along with other cultural representations of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, continue to circulate and produce experiences of recognition, belonging, and community.

The concept of community as a social construction, albeit a powerful one, did not escape my interviewees. One former Archives coordinator referred to community as “abstract commonalities that people are fed by,” and added further, “I like to say joining a community rather than becoming aware of some biological or otherwise placed body laden or body specific impulse because I prefer that kind of notion, that kind of construction of sexual identity as a chosen one and a community based socially constructed one” (P. Thistlethwaite, personal communication, July 24, 2013). This formulation of community as constructed yet still very much real reflects Anderson’s assertion that though communities

are invented, they are not fabricated, and though they are imagined, they are not false (1983, 6).

Moving Beyond Identity

Community scholars have long agreed that community is “a largely mental construct” (Cohen, 1985:108), referring to “symbolic communities” (Bagguley, 1991) or community as a “conscience collective” (Cohen, 1987:16). In her seething critique of the uncritical use of the concept, Miranda Joseph insists that communities are not “organic, natural, spontaneous occurrences;” instead, they are carefully constructed, constituted, and maintained (2002: ix). Joseph warns, “While identity is often named as the bond among community members, it is a false name in that communal participants are not identical and many of those to whom an identity is attributed do not participate in communal activities” (2002: viii). Archives members had similar critiques of community as is the case of Polly who observed, “sometimes it can be used to falsely homogenize. But at its most useful, it can be used to justify the surfacing of certain commonalities” (personal communication, July 24, 2013). Another interviewee pointed to the “over-extended application of the idea of community” (Violet, personal communication, August 4, 2013).

This homogenizing and hyper-extended application of the idea of community, based on a lesbian identity, is evident in the first Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter which laid out the organization’s purpose and goals: “We began to focus on our need to collect and preserve our own voices, the voices of our Lesbian community. As our contribution to our community, we decided to undertake the collecting, preserving, and making available to our sisters all the prints of our existence...we want to encompass the happenings of the whole lesbian community”. The newsletter claims, “The existence of these Archives will

enable us to analyze and reevaluate the Lesbian experience” (no. 1, 1975: 1-2). Four and a half decades ago the LHA was founded upon the assumption of a singular Lesbian experience that could be collected, curated and represented, but today the complexity of identity and the fluid, fractured nature of community is widely recognized by the Archives Collective.

Community as Fluid

Inevitably, in my conversations with LHA coordinators, volunteers, interns, and visitors, questions of naming and shifting identities would arise and further complicate an interviewee’s attempt to clearly define and characterize community. One visitor to the Archives spoke to this:

We can’t say same sex, you know? Because there’s really no such thing. Now we’re like, oh, because all this post-modernism, right? So we’re like breaking down all the identities and we’re breaking down the definitions and we’re breaking down all the sexualities and making everything fluid and messy. And how do you have community around something that’s so chaotic? That’s not cohesive? (Julie, personal communication, August 12, 2013)

Similarly, one coordinator alluded to the complexity, and perhaps inconsequentiality, of terminology stating, “whether you want to use queer or you want to use lesbian or same gender loving woman, whatever the terms are, you know, it’s so amorphous at this point” (S. Smith, personal communication, July 28, 2013).

These conversations raise a question about terminology—questions like, can we really use these terms interchangeably as that runs the risk of collapsing real material differences? And this further leads to the problem of defining and describing a community that they cannot name. This also raises questions about *what* materials documenting *which* communities belong in the Lesbian Herstory Archives. When discussing the inclusion of materials related to transgender individuals, one founding member insists, “It’s a different

archive” (D. Edel, personal communication, July 10, 2013). Despite her belief that trans lives belong in a different archive, Deb recognizes the fluidity of identity noting that there will be crossover: “It’s a different archive, but it doesn’t mean we don’t also try to collect some of that history. Because it’s so unclear. And there’s such fluidity that if we limited stuff now we would be screwing up the future” (personal communication, July 10, 2013). While looking to the future, Deb also acknowledges the past: “We have letters and papers and support from men who were lesbian separatists and now are trans men...They understand that the archives is not for them now, okay?” (personal communication, July 10, 2013). This part of the interview with Deb was not without long pauses, heavy sighs, and re-articulations. This is not an easy topic and there is no simple answer. Such conversations were common during my fieldwork at the Archives, and they speak to a larger question: How do we speak of identity-based community when identity itself may shift, evolve, or change entirely?

Community as Fractured

When asked to define community Shawnta did not conjure up an image of a utopian entity characterized by “unity, communion and purity,” an inaccurate if not painfully common characterization of community according to Joseph (2002: xix). Instead, Shawnta paints for us a picture of community using the metaphor of a disabled body.

When I think of the lesbian community, I think of disjointed, broken. I think of a body with many disabilities, you know, or many abilities. Or just like, it’s connected; there are joints there. They work, but they don’t necessarily, they’re not placed in the right way. I feel the brokenness of the Lesbian community. (S. Smith, personal communication, July 28, 2013)

In the article *Time, Temporality and the Dynamics of Community*, Kenyon argues that “community can be distinguished both by unity and/or fragmentation and difference,” and that it is only when we attempt to classify community as unchanging and “harmonious

entities that will fit into geographical, social or identity categories” that they become useless as a conceptual tool (2000, 23). Much like Kenyon, Shawnta does not believe fragmentation and dissent to be the end to community, but instead she sees it as productive and essential to successful identification with a community:

That’s almost like part of the definition, is always being critical of the community and redefining it and maybe reevaluating it or reclaiming it, but always questioning its existence. Always choosing to be a part of it or outside of it, but having to define it so you can make a choice. Even if you choose to be outside of it, you’re still part of it because part of it is wanting to be outside of it. (personal communication, July 28, 2013)

While Shawnta’s description of the fractured community ultimately remains positive seeing such disjointedness as functional, for Julie such a lack of common experience and understanding becomes dysfunctional and can serve as a barrier to experiencing community:

There are these queers that sort of hate themselves and are trying to be cured and there are the queer Christians and the queer Buddhists, and the queer Muslims, and the queer democrats, and the queer progressives, and the queer anarchists, you know, like we don’t really have a broader queer community anymore. Because now we are able to have other identities- it used to be like you could just be queer. Before people started recognizing intersectionality it was just all about like, we’re queer and so we have to be queer above anything else. And now there’s all kinds of break-away sort of communities and all this intersectionality is happening and so now it feels like how can we even have; how can you have a unified community when there’s really not much to unify on except for the fact that we like to fuck the same sex. And there you get even more, you know, complicated because of gender identity. (Julie, personal communication, August 12, 2013)

Here, Julie makes the argument that identity politics as usual have no place in a culture where queerness is no longer a master status and intersectionality is recognized. For Julie, there is no such thing as “the queer community,” or “the LGBTQ community”.

While the dominant narrative put forth by the Lesbian Herstory Archives stresses sameness and unity, divisions within the Lesbian Community were alluded to in a few later newsletter articles. One article about the 25th Anniversary Gala for the Archives refers to a performance “that served to pull us all together and weave something coherent out of this

disparate lesbian community that comes together in the Archives and came together that night at the Gala" (The Lesbian Herstory Archive Newsletter, no. 18, 2001). Most of these references to a fractured community come later in the history of the organization reflecting broader critiques of identity politics taking center stage in activist and intellectual circles the 1980s and 1990s (hooks, 1984; Crenshaw, 1991; Bernstein, 2005).

While the Lesbian Herstory Archives are, no doubt, community archives, the question may arise, whose community archives? Who participates in the day to day running of the Archives? Whose time and money keep the organization afloat? Whose lives and memories are housed within the Archives holdings? Who calls the space "home"? While the rhetoric in Archives' publicity materials point to "the existence of a knowable and known lesbian community," it is necessary to examine how this theoretical lesbian community does or does not reflect reality (Joseph, xiv). In the following pages questions of inclusion, exclusion, and ultimately, who bears responsibility for representation at and in the Archives, will be taken up.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives Community

A community, at once geographical and relational, coalesces around the Lesbian Herstory Archives. One Archives Coordinator explains:

Yes, the lesbians at LHA are my community...I get invited to their personal and community gatherings...I've also, as a librarian, found it very rewarding to have personal relationships with the coordinators as it has been beneficial to my career. Maxine invites me to her house once a year for Dyke Dinner and then we always plan a lunch of some sort. Desiree has been my shoulder during a break-up one too many times; Paula has come to my cabaret. Leni and I have exchanged information on publishing, Saskia and I have long phone conversations and flirt. Rachel and AmyBeth and I cross paths at the CUNY Graduate Center and are always excited to see each other and to talk for long periods of time. And I have a huge crush on one of the other coordinators that isn't here anymore, Flavia. And then Alexis and I are a power team this past year... (S. Smith, personal communication, July 28, 2013)

For coordinators like Shawnta, many of whom have long and storied relationships to the Archives, their professional lives, personal lives, activist lives, and even their love lives are all entangled within the organization. I also spoke to several Archives interns who felt a sense of belonging to the LHA community. One intern explains, “You build, however strong or not strong, lasting or not lasting, relationships with these people that you meet at the Archives. And there are so few lesbians out there sometimes so to be in a space with so many...!” (Courtney, personal communication, July 19, 2013). In contrast to the community portrayed by the Coordinators, this intern-described community is less intimate and more fleeting. This makes sense as the interns often come to the Archives from a distance and for a finite period of time—usually a semester or a summer. Their core communities of family, friends, or University wait for their return at the end of their internship period. For this reason, the interns speak more to the affinity-based, imagined community discussed earlier in the chapter. One intern from the mid-90’s wrote an article about her internship experience at LHA:

In addition to the Archives collection, however, I had something even more valuable: a community. I was living in Park Slope, a neighborhood with as dense a lesbian population as San Francisco or the West Village, and I was working with women who had years of experience as women, as lesbians, as members of a community, as activists... (The Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter, no. 16, 1996)

When reading this intern’s letter one gets a sense of someone standing on the outside looking in—a distanced sort of belonging, lacking the intimacy that comes along with all of those years of being women, lesbians, activists, and in community together. Despite this distance, the intern feels empowered by her belonging to this imagined community of lesbian women.

Here we begin to see in practice the theoretical layering of community described by interviewees at the start of this chapter. There is a core community of coordinators and longtime volunteers and beyond this exists another layer of community—the more transitory community of interns and short-term volunteers. The next layer of community consists of those who are not coordinators, volunteers or interns, but those who may visit the Archives for scholarly purposes, personal reasons, or to take part in the variety of programming put on each year by LHA and partner organizations.

Building Community

As long as we are active, we build community. –Archives Coordinator

Through a variety of outreach practices, the Lesbian Herstory Archives seeks to build community that extends beyond the Coordinating Committee or Internship and Volunteer programs. One way this community building takes place is through events sponsored by the Archives, often times in collaboration with other community organizations. I happened to be conducting my fieldwork at the Archives during the busiest time of year for such outreach—Pride Month. Each year, the Archives participates in Pride Month by hosting events such as open houses and tours of the building. In addition, Archives members attend the plethora of greater New York City and Brooklyn Pride events where they hand out informational materials, and to support other community organizations hosting events for the larger LGBTQ Community. At the Dyke March in Midtown Manhattan I was spotted in the crowd by an Archives intern and was handed a huge stack of Archives flyers to pass out to the thousands of marchers and spectators. These flyers urged readers to come on over to Brooklyn and check out the Archives. The following month, the interns organized a Lesbian Speed Dating event at the Archives that brought dozens, some of them first time visitors, to the Brooklyn brownstone.

These and other events are successful in bringing new people to the Archives, introducing individuals who might not otherwise meet, and bringing in much needed revenue to sustain the day-to-day operation of the Archives. One young coordinator noted, “You get a very intergenerational, crazy mix of people....it’s really the event based things where you start to be able to see that there’s something special going on and that these are groups of people that don’t interact with each other on a regular basis usually” (Lena, interpersonal communication, July 24, 2013).

Another means of community building takes place through aiding and connecting scholars who use the Archives’ holdings. From the first newsletter published the Archives founders made this a priority, encouraging lesbians interested in particular projects to notify LHA so that they could be connected to others working on similar topics. “We can help each other with the task of discovery and recovery” (Newsletter no. 1, 1975). Later issues of the newsletter included a “Research Questions and Information Needs Section” that served as a sort of classifieds space or directory for lesbian researchers as well as lesbian groups or individuals seeking information (Newsletter no. 5, 1979). This emphasis on connecting scholars continues today. Introductions by coordinators to other scholars and visitors using the Archives often punctuated my long hours of solitary archival research. During my time at LHA these introductions yielded several lasting professional and personal connections. In addition to these tangible benefits of the introductions, I personally felt myself to be a part of a community of queer researchers doing important work—a feeling that often sustains me even now as I pore over the pages of this chapter. I interviewed other researchers that expressed similar experiences: “I interacted with several archive users doing fascinating research projects. Those conversations, however

brief, also contributed to a sense of queer community that I need because I live in Michigan the rest of the year” (Violet, personal communication, February 2, 2014). Another visiting scholar noted: “I left not just with copies of documents for my research, but also a sense of connection to a community of people who had found these materials valuable, and lesbians’ lives a worthy topic for history” (Ryan, personal communication, August 1, 2013).

While hosting events and connecting researchers are successful strategies in building material and tangible communities, LHA has long sought to build community amongst individuals geographically distant from the Archives and from each other. Though the Archives newsletters have been mentioned throughout this section, I’d like to briefly highlight the importance of the newsletters themselves in building and sustaining a community that crosses city, state, and even national borders. Over the course of four decades, each issue of the Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter has reached thousands of lesbians across the United States and beyond.

The newsletters served an array of purposes, chiefly to inform, support, and connect lesbians worldwide. These publications included updates on the day to day goings on at the Archives, calls for the donation of items to include in the Archives’ holdings, national news items thought to be of concern to lesbians, editorials on a variety of issues, poetry and art sent in by women, and bibliographies on myriad topics. The newsletters are interactive, inviting participation by lesbians the world over. For example, the Winter 1984 issue of the newsletter invites readers to complete a cultural survey on the iconic novel, *The Well of Loneliness*, by Radcliffe Hall, seeking to determine its significance for lesbians from all walks of life (Newsletter no. 8, 1984). The very next issue of the newsletter included a sampling of responses to the survey—a series of touching excerpts detailing the profound

impact the book had on some women. In theory, through this survey and responses to it, lesbians in Odessa, Texas could read about and experience communion with lesbians in Akron, Ohio.

Building a Community Archives

For the founders and other members of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, building community and building Archives' holdings that reflect that community are joint goals. This is an organization that "prides itself on being a community-based organization, one that shapes and reflects that community" (P. Thistlethwaite, personal communication, July 24, 2013). One obvious tactic used to build an Archives that reflected the community was to elicit the help of the community itself. Powerful pleas for individual and organization contributions to the Archives' holdings are present in nearly every newsletter issued. An article written by founder Joan Nestle and reproduced in a 1979 newsletter makes the case:

We ask every Lesbian woman to participate in weaving this tapestry of Lesbian life. We ask for a sign: a letter, a drawing, a photograph, a voice, a song in all the languages we speak. The women in the Archives collective have undertaken the responsibility of collecting the published material but we know the vast greater power of the waiting words, the voices who think they have nothing to say and yet live the strength and beauty of our culture every day. We ask for moments of self-cherishing. (Newsletter no. 5, 1979)

A flyer widely distributed and reproduced in another newsletter specifically targets Lesbian organizations nationwide: "We are very concerned that the Archives represent all women in the Lesbian community, that the future has as full a portrait of who we were as possible. To achieve this, we need the help of all organizations in the Lesbian community." A list of five suggestions for organizations follows this appeal, and the flyer concludes with the following: "Our goal is to end invisibility-please help" (Newsletter no. 6, 1980).

The LHA also seeks to fully represent “the Lesbian community” by avoiding placing limits on what will be accepted and included within the Archives. A long-time Archives coordinator emphasized this explaining,

Everybody has a right to their own history and so, you know, you don't keep people out because they don't fit your, you know, profile. Like, for instance, there was a period when there were loads of archives around the world, lesbian archives, that wouldn't let in pro-porn women or S&M women or whatever and we just never took that stance. The stance we took was exactly the opposite. Everybody has the right to their history. (M. Wolfe, personal communication, July 25, 2013)

This position is underscored in a 1981 newsletter containing a bibliography on sexuality.

An introduction to the bibliography highlights the importance of not censoring history. The writer alludes to the sex war debates around pornography and S&M taking place in the wider lesbian community at the time and asks that “judgments not be transformed into history.” The author calls for lesbians to “take courageous steps in sharing sexual lives with the archives in the form of statements, photographs, letters on tapes” (Newsletter no. 7, 1981).

Another coordinator highlights the breadth of the Archives holdings by stating, “We keep material that's about people that are our enemies, and we keep material about women that people don't like because they were Nazis or because they were right-wingers or something...somebody should know that there are right wing lesbians” (M. Wolfe, personal communication, July 25, 2013), while yet another insists, “We do not discriminate, not knowingly, you know, *On Our Backs* next to *Off our Backs*, my favorite example” (S. Smith, personal communication, July 26, 2013). This felt imperative to collect and represent the community without judgment or discrimination is best expressed by co-founder Deb Edel:

I think the mission is to make sure that we are collecting the most diverse representation of lesbian life as we know it historically and presently. To preserve it the best way we can so that women now, lesbians now and lesbians in the future, will have a really broad

representation of who lesbians were. If we leave it up to traditional historians and traditional researchers in the straight world, we will be a white, classist group. That's who we will be seen as. (personal communication, July 10, 2013)

Though examples from interviews and newsletters point to the personal and organizational commitment to an archive that represents the diversity of lesbian life, recognizing identity and community as fluid and fractured, one might wonder how this notional commitment translates to everyday practices within the Archives. The next section of this chapter explores the extent to which LHA has been successful in meeting these ambitious goals.

Social Class in the Archives

The Lesbian Herstory Archives were founded on the principal that all lesbians, regardless of social class or education level, must have access to the archives. For this reason, it has always been strongly held that the archives must remain independent and in the hands of the Lesbian Community. The founders and early coordinators of the Archives witnessed so many grassroots community archives become unsustainable and were subsumed by universities and government organizations. Worried about their own archives since such co-optation of archives would result in the materials becoming inaccessible to those whose lives they documented, the Archives governing board vowed that this must never be the fate of the LHA materials. In a 1979 Archives Newsletter, Joan Nestle wrote, "Our Archives must never be for sale; it must never be housed in an institution created by those who exiled us from generational continuity; it must be accessible to all Lesbian women; it must show its dedication to denying the rule of racism and classism as separators of Lesbian women" (No. 5, 1979).

To create and maintain an Archives independent of university or government support requires a great deal of capital, and the Archives coordinators were faced with the

task of raising those funds. Fundraising experts consulting with the Coordinators suggested that the LHA go after wealthy donors and provide incentives in the form of naming rights or exclusive, star-studded galas.

They always come to us with a model that not-for-profits use that is just not us. VIP events, events where certain people pay more money than others. One group of people—very well meaning—thought we should sell shelves. And they would have your name on it, you know? We would always respond with, what about all the people who volunteer and don't have any money but have kept us going for all of these years?! (M. Wolfe, personal communication, July 25, 2013)

Another coordinator elaborated: “We’re very conscious of class and so we’ve always said we would not do naming rights...for some people writing a check for a thousand dollars is easy, and for some people writing a check for five dollars is hard” (D. Edel, personal communication, July 10, 2013). Avoiding this kind of fundraising strategy may have hurt the organization’s financial bottom line, but it remained true to LHA’s commitment to accessibility for all Lesbians regardless of class or education.

Another way the LHA maintains this commitment to accessibility is through their sliding scale policy for all events and services. This policy is laid out in an early newsletter: “The Archives has never and never will charge a fee for information use; and all our events are more if/less if (a wonderful Lesbian feminist tradition)”¹⁹ (Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter, no. 9, 1986). This policy extends to include any and all events co-sponsored by the organization.

I asked each of my interviewees how this commitment to class-consciousness translated onto the day-to-day operation of the Archives, and whether the Archives were

¹⁹ This refers to a sliding scale fee model popular among feminist organizations in the 1970’s and 1980’s.

run and used by individuals from diverse social class and educational backgrounds.²⁰ The consensus was that despite LHA's best efforts in terms of policy and political commitments, the space is largely run and used by middle-class, academic-oriented individuals. One intern explained, "Without outreach the people that tend to find us find us through universities" (Katie, personal communication, July 24, 2013). Another intern noted that while those that operate the Archives are welcoming and kind, and that the space itself is comfortable and homey, "it could be a very intimidating space for someone who is working class...it's in a brownstone. It's got so much stuff in it. Like so many books! And the way the space is set up feels homey to me but feels really middle class" (Nicole, personal communication, July 18, 2013). One Archives coordinator provided an example of a time when the intellectual, academic nature of the LHA became clear to her:

In reality we don't get as diverse of a mix of people as our actual statement [of purpose] might suggest. Down the street there's a women's shelter that Queers for Economic Justice does a support group with the lesbians who are there, and so I gave them the tour-set up via QHA obviously- I think probably about a half year ago and it was so amazing to me how different everything was. I had to rethink how I was doing the tour completely because usually when I start the tour it's very like, this came out of a conference, and I just realized that there was this like blank stare on everybody's faces and so I skipped ahead a bit on the tour and then after that they were so, they were first of all excited that there was a space down the street that they could just go to because I don't think people who are intellectual and have college degrees and are in institutions where we have certain privileges, um I forget that this is the type of space that is usually attached to that privilege. (Lena, personal communication, July 24, 2013)

Despite their excitement about the space and promises to return, none of those women ever came back to LHA. Lena reflected on this saying, "And I do often think about how it would actually look if they did come here. What would they do, how would that look to other people? What would the interaction be between the people who are writing their

²⁰ It is important to note that the majority of the Archives coordinators are professional, highly educated, middle class women. Most of the interns and volunteers, especially those that I came into contact with, are in the process of earning college degrees and will likely follow along these education and class lines.

fancy books and people who are reading the Call of the Wild on the couch?” (personal communication, July 24, 2013).

Race in the Archives

“I find it so difficult to talk about this stuff” –White Archives Coordinator

According to my interview data, while there is currently a strong presence of women of color, specifically black women²¹, on the Archives Coordinating Committee, interns, volunteers, and visitors to the Archives are mostly white. Shawnta, a black Archives Coordinator who has devoted years to organizing black lesbians around the LHA Collection, attributes this to what she calls the invisibility myth:

Since I’ve been here there’s been a lot of reticence from... I do a lot of women of color, or queer women of color, organizing and theater work and performance and so I know a lot of people in the community and there’s this assumption that there are no black lesbians in history, there’s no black lesbians in the Lesbian Herstory Archives. That frustrates me! And even researchers who come here, they come here under the guise of, “well since black lesbians don’t exist I want to do this underground research,” and I am constantly dispelling that invisibility myth of black lesbians throughout lesbian herstory. (S. Smith, personal communication, July 28, 2013)

Shawnta calls this narrative of black lesbian invisibility a myth because she knows that there have been black lesbians throughout history, and she has her research as evidence.

During a planning meeting for a CUNY Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies conference called “In Amerika They Call Us Dykes: Lesbian Lives in the 70s,” a committee member inferred that there were no black lesbians active at the time. Others sitting around the table concurred, and certainly, no one disagreed. Shawnta was shocked:

²¹ Of note is the slippage that takes place between notions of race and blackness in this section. While my interview questions often inquire broadly about “women of color,” the interview participant responds specifically in relation to black women. My overlooking this during interviews prevented me from asking more pointed questions about racial inclusion that move beyond a dichotomous understanding of race.

I felt very like, tense, because I was like “oh so there should be no black lesbians in this conference? So maybe I should just go...I’m going to do all this work there’s not going to be any black lesbians here? Fuck that!” That was sort of the start of the invisibility mantra for me, or when I identified its source in some ways so I was like, alright, there has to be someone. (personal communication, July 28, 2013)

Unsure of what she would find but knowing that she had to try, Shawnta took to the general subject files at the Lesbian Herstory Archives in an attempt to dispel this myth.

Overwhelmed at the incredible amount of information she found without much effort at all, Shawnta set out to create a record of these accomplishments. The *Black Lesbians in the 70s Zine*,²² a chronological account of the incredible lives and activism of black lesbians during the nineteen seventies, was born. While Shawnta’s (re)discovery of the rich history of Black lesbians in the 1970’s may successfully counter the idea that there were no Black lesbians active during this time, having often experienced such erasure by white lesbians, some Black lesbians have been reluctant to become involved in predominantly white organizations. Shawnta explains:

Even when I was here interviewing the women of Salsa Soul who, they put out their call to women in 1976 as the first Third World Women, African Ancestral Lesbian organization, they still walk with the mantra “We are not at the table.” And they’ve been saying that and they’ve been producing that. I talked to them about that and they were like, “yeah CLAGS had a conference in 2010 and there were no Black Lesbians” and I was like, “hey! Dude! (waves hand) Seriously? Seriously?!?!” (personal communication, July 28, 2013)

According to Shawnta, this invisibility narrative that is reproduced by women of color organizations breeds “a strong aversion to the principles of the Archives” and deters women of color from attending Archives events or becoming involved with the organization in other ways. Shawnta speaks to the personal trial of being heavily involved in an organization that does not attract a large number of other black women her age:

²² *Black Lesbians in the 70s Zine* has been incredibly successful and widely distributed with all proceeds from sales going to the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

It is also a challenge that the other women who walk into the space that are my age are white and we don't actually roll with the same crowds socially...this means that I am always aiming to get my sexy dyke of color friends into the space to contribute and be present. A black lesbian intern will start next Monday and I'm excited to influence her participation for a long-term stay! (personal communication, July 28, 2013)

Shawnta suggests there is a feedback relationship where the lack of involvement by women of color further contributes to the positioning of LHA as a mostly white space, which in turn feeds the invisibility myth—it's a perpetual cycle.

When asked why so many women of color believe the Archives to be a white space, Shawnta responded, "Oh, well because feminism is white and I think the Archives is seen as feminist because the founders self-identified as feminist" (personal communication).

Another (white) coordinator's statement regarding the women's movement reveals inconsistencies among various Archives members' understandings of the complexities of race and feminism:

I think that the women's movement has actually been very, very good about having discussions about race and politics...you know, not only because the women of color brought up the subject matter but also because the white women had experience in analyzing [oppression]. And you know, I'm sure that a bunch of them had the nerve to acknowledge that things were bad or wrong or weird or whatever. I find it so difficult to talk about this stuff. (personal communication, July 28, 2013)

For a black woman and a white woman to experience the same event, organization, or entire movement differently is no surprise. bell hooks reminds us: while feminism has been romanticized historically as a movement for the equality of all women, "every women's movement in America from its earliest origin to the present day has been built on a racist foundation" (2015: 124). hooks points out that although the educated, middle and upper class white women of the women's liberation movement imagined a "full transformation of society" that moved beyond mere equality with men, once they attempted to enact radical change in real life it became clear that they had "not undone the

sexist and racist brainwashing that had taught them to regard women unlike themselves as Others” (p. 121). It’s important to note that while this is readily evident to women of color who live every day as the Other, many white feminists remain blissfully ignorant of this, holding on to their uncomplicated vision of Sisterhood. This mindset is so prominent that we have a name for it now: white feminism. So yes, though it is unsurprising that Shawnta and other black women experience feminism as white while Saskia, a white woman, praises the women’s movement for its handling of race and racism, this fact does point to the absolute necessity for an organization such as the Lesbian Herstory Archives to build a racially and ethnically diverse governing body and internship and volunteer program where a variety of perspectives are heard. Furthermore, it indicates the need for the organization to reach out and pursue the active engagement of communities of color. But is this enough? If, as hooks points out, every women’s movement in the U.S. has been built on a racist foundation, perhaps the add and stir approach advocated by Shawnta and others is not enough.

Moving beyond the myth of invisibility discussed by Shawnta, Joana Coppi, a German geographer who wrote her masters’ thesis on the Lesbian Herstory Archives, offers another perspective. She argues that racial inclusion (or exclusion) at the LHA has not been static, rather it has shifted in relation to the space the Archives occupies, and relatedly, the primary concerns of the time. For the first twenty years of LHA’s existence, it was housed in Joan’s large Manhattan apartment, and Coppi suggests that this fact “sidelined financial questions in the 1980’s and allowed for an emphasis on cultural and political activism across race and class” (2012:69). Coppi contends that the creation of a building fund and the turn to fundraising as the primary goal of the organization served to

shift concern away from inclusive activism. This claim is supported in part by Polly Thistlethwaite's 1998 assertion that "the institution was organized, supported, and dominated by a primarily white lesbian community constituency" (Giesecking, 2015:28).

Despite the challenges of creating a racially inclusive space, the Lesbian Herstory Archives is celebrated for its extensive collection of materials by and about black and African American lesbians. With a note of pride, Shawnta compares the LHA holdings to those of a well-known, well-funded nearby Archives:

We're often compared to the Schomburg's Black LGBT Archive...If you go to the Schomburg's Black LGBT Archive and you look in their Kaiser Index of Black Resources it forwards you! Everything that's under lesbians, it forwards you to the Archives. If forwards you to LHA! We have what they have and more. They have men. If you want black men. We are the source for Black Lesbian Herstory. (personal communication, July 28, 2013)

These holdings were used to create two special exhibits, *Keepin' On: Images of African American Lesbians from the Lesbian Herstory Archives*, and *Audre Lorde*, that continue to travel around the country and throughout Europe educating thousands about the lives and contributions of black lesbians. But what about other racial and ethnic groups that may not be as well represented within the collection: those groups for whom there are not enough traces of their existence to warrant a special exhibition? Surely race is not limited to a binary of black and white. What about representation of those who may not fit neatly into the categories of "woman" or "lesbian"? Who bears responsibility for ensuring that the lives and contributions of these individuals and communities are not lost to future generations?

Responsibility and Self-Archiving

My conversation with Shawnta about race and representation within the Archives raised the question of responsibility: who is responsible for ensuring that the Lesbian

Herstory Archives' holdings reflect racially and otherwise diverse lesbian communities?

Shawnta strongly believes that the responsibility lies within individuals themselves.

If they want to say they're at the table, they have to put themselves at the table, and part of that is as simple as putting your stuff at the Archives. And allowing it to be found. And not sitting at home saying, I don't exist. And so, I mean, I say here's how you start: What do you want to archive? What is the stuff that you want to give? (personal communication, July 28, 2013)

Shawnta adds, "Understand that all things are created by people and that all things are subjective and some things get put on the table and some don't. The only reason why these people are here (gestures around the room) is because they put themselves in the Archives" (personal communication, July 28, 2013).

The imperative to self-archive, or to be one's own archivist by organizing and preserving one's own materials is a frequent subject of articles appearing in the Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter, dating back to the early issues published in the late 1970s. As more and more librarians and archivists became involved with the LHA, the tone of the articles became more urgent and they started including detailed instructions on "Preserving Your Papers," or "being the archivist of your own collection" (Newsletters, no. 8 and 12). One particularly powerful article on the topic published in a 1999 newsletter recapped a conference keynote speech given by founder, publisher, and editor of Firebrand Books, Nancy Bereano:

She addressed the issue of how being a lesbian is not culturally chic, due to media coverage. We frequently see two model-like women labeled "lesbians" on a magazine cover with makeup, long hair, and long nails (ouch!), kissing. We watch talk shows and sitcoms about "who we are." Bereano warned us not to embrace this media image that is created by them and then fed back to us. She also cautioned us not to fall into the trap of trying to live up to their imaginary lesbian. You and I can stop these false presentations and create authentic lesbian herstory! We can start by learning to value ourselves through our lifes' works. (Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter no. 17)

The author of the article goes on to make a case for individual lesbians preserving their papers and belongings in order to reject false images of lesbians and to fully represent authentic lesbian communities. This article is powerful because the author implicates each and every lesbian woman suggesting that Nancy Bereano, a rock star in the lesbian feminist community at the time, is calling on them to reclaim and rewrite their stories.

Fast forward fourteen years to the LHA dining room where I sit speaking with Shawnta and the impassioned call for each lesbian to take responsibility and to set her own place at the table continues to linger.

I think within the queer community that's super important to dispel the invisibility myth within our own communities and the invisibility myth within the world. We have to define who we are; we have to put our stuff on the table. We have to name it, classify it, call it, package it, preserve it, keep it, you know? And I think that is an obligation. It's a right. A birthright. We have to do it, you know? (personal communication, July 28, 2013)

Shawnta proceeds to give me an alternative example of how she personally takes on the responsibility of ensuring diverse representation at and within the Archives. In 2009 LHA organized an art benefit where they invited known lesbian artists to donate one piece of art to be raffled off with the resultant proceeds going to the organization. Of the 88 pieces donated for the fundraiser, according to Shawnta, women of color artists created only seven or eight (personal communication, July 28, 2013). In order to address this inequality, Shawnta joined the committee for the next art benefit, where she worked to reach out to more women of color artists. For Shawnta, this is what it means to take responsibility to ensure one's place at the table, and the organizational model of LHA makes that possible. She says:

You have to be a self-defined lesbian and then you can do everything that everybody else does. And this is about being inclusive to the entire community and not putting the responsibility on one person or one type of person. It's also saying that if we fail, it's

everybody's fault, you know, and so then it's everybody's opportunity to make us not fail, to make us survive. (personal communication, July 28, 2013)

After this exchange with Shawnta, I began raising the issue of responsibility in my interviews with others involved at LHA to see if they agreed that it was individuals and not the organization that held responsibility to ensure widespread representation. For some it was clear: "Everybody has to be responsible for their own legacy" (white coordinator, personal communication, July 24, 2013), while for others the matter was a little more complicated. One current Archives intern, a white woman, initially responded: "The question of responsibility here is an interesting one because I feel like, I always fall back on the Archives are volunteer run, like, (laughing) so sorry about that!" Becoming serious again she continues,

But like, what kind of excuse is that when there's like this dearth of representation of a really important group of people, of lesbians. I mean, I know so maybe it would be in the Archives' interest to contact, I was just reading about this group, I think it was Muslim lesbians in New York City...I think if the Archives are noticing there's a lack of representation in that area specifically, they could like reach out to this group... (personal communication, July 24, 2013)

Saskia, a longtime coordinator at the Archives, a white Dutch woman, indicated that while at one time she may have believed that responsibility fell on the individual, this is no longer the case. She does, however, recognize how a lack of available resources might come into play:

Once you are aware of the absence of something, ideally you would go out and look for that stuff. Within our limited resources, maybe we can't. But this is what infuriates me. Every time when somebody says, oh you think we're too male-identified, well then give me ten examples of women who can do it. I'm like, no! It's your job to go and find it.

Drawing parallels with other situations where a group of oppressed, excluded people are expected to do the work and make the case for their own inclusion, Saskia says "No! It's our job" (personal communication, July 26, 2013).

Saskia, who identifies as a cis gender, lesbian woman, shared an example of how she personally is taking responsibility to ensure that trans and gender-nonconforming individuals are represented within the Archives.

I have been thinking about this a lot recently, and I've been thinking about it in terms of the trans community...how can we do something, you know? I don't necessarily want to spend a lot of my time thinking about something that I find problematic, I'd rather go out and play with the kids! But one of the first things I did when I started to realize that we have to reach out ourselves is that I took one of my photographs that I didn't have at the Archives yet. It's Leslie Feinberg- it's a fabulous photo and I put it up [into the digital holdings]. I made it part of our collection so at that point I could integrate the word trans in our database. And I took the work of Della Grace, now called Del La Grace Volcano, and got permission to put up his work and integrate it. So at least there is a start. (personal communication, July 26, 2013)

Expressing a desire for others to join her, Saskia said, "I'm not saying that every time you go to bed you have to think, who did I forget? Who did I forget!? But it would be great, I would love it if people were just friendly and say I've realized you don't have anything by so and so but here is some" (personal communication, July 26, 2013). For Saskia, the inclusion of trans and genderqueer folks within the Archives could really be just that easy. Several months of field observations and dozens of interviews tell a different story.

Gender Identity in the Archives

Kate Eichhorn, author of *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, marvels at the longevity of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, arguing,

This is an especially notable achievement because more than most surviving women's organizations from the 1970's, the LHA has clung to its original principles, many deeply inflected by the era's radical feminist and lesbian separatist ideologies. If it has managed to survive and attract the support of younger women, however, it is because the archive has not blindly clung to its original principles...it has made an effort to adapt to changing understandings of gender and sexuality (for example, by working to accommodate and accept the place of transgender women who identify as lesbians and transgender men who once identified as butch dykes). (2013:49)

As Eichhorn points out, the Lesbian Herstory Archives faces the unique challenge of merging its past, lesbian separatist roots with the present socio-political moment where the categories of sex and gender are called into question at every turn. How does an

organization that is not only created out of a particular historical moment, but also sees the preservation of that historical moment to be a guiding principle, adapt to prevailing ideals without abandoning everything it stands for? This question weighs heavily on many who are closely affiliated with the LHA, and their struggle with this becomes most evident when discussing sex, gender, and belonging at the Archives.

One of the founding members of the Archives raised this issue when discussing the lesbian-separatist roots of the organization. She points out that there are many lesbians, whose own materials are housed at the Archives, who are adamant about not sharing space with men. For these individuals, a woman-only space is incredibly important. There are also collections within the Archives' holdings that were donated with the caveat that only women would view the contents (D. Edel, personal communication). This all seemed pretty straightforward in the mid-seventies and eighties when sex and gender were still widely accepted as inherently binary, but how does this desire for a woman-only space translate to this contemporary moment? My research reveals that despite Eichhorn's praise of LHA for adapting to the changing understanding of sex and gender, it doesn't translate very well, and certainly not without a degree of conflict and tension.

A founding member of the Archives explained to me that while the Archives has adapted in many ways and is no longer a woman-only space, there are limits to this inclusionary turn. She summarizes the issue like this:

It's a warm and inclusive space. Yes, you're welcome to come and use it the same way anybody is welcome to come and use it, but we're not going to change for you. Because that's not who we are. And that's causing, every once in a while...that causes some friction. But my belief is that there needs to be broader understanding, but there also needs to be a space where trans women who are now men, or trans...trans have an archives that reflects their lives. (personal communication, July 10, 2013)

It became very clear in this and other interviews with Archives elders that there is a degree of discomfort and misunderstanding around transgender identities, particularly in regards to naming. Here Deb struggles with finding the words to describe the group she's referring to: "there's a younger generation of...trans...I I I don't know....trans people...women to trans people..."(personal communication, July 10, 2013). Another coordinator struggles to distinguish between butch and trans: "There's a whole group of lesbians who I think are butch and they say no, they're trans. They don't say trans men and they don't, I mean, they don't say trans men and they don't say men. And they float around in that in-between position" (personal communication, August 8, 2013). As seen above, part of this misunderstanding and discomfort can be attributed to the inability to access the right words to describe what they see. This is compounded by their refusal to accept, at face value, the experience and self-definition of trans individual lives.

Some of the early Archives coordinators called into question the existence of trans as an identity, suggesting that perhaps individuals felt trapped by gender role expectations and turned to a trans identity as a solution, a false consciousness of sorts. One coordinator said,

I could make an argument that the whole issue of transgender is ridiculous. Because as a feminist I believe that you should be able to express yourself any way you want to without having to chop off body parts. Which, I think is like giving into the medical establishment, okay? In the same way that I feel that, you know, cosmetic surgery is being sold to women especially. (personal communication, July 25, 2013)

Another early and long-time coordinator, began by admitting that she was generalizing, but she struggled to put her thoughts into words:

You may think that you're not, that you are, that you've sort of been a guy but what you're really thinking is that I hate that I'm forced to behave in a typical women's fashion. Um...I mean there are examples of kids who have gone through one sex change and have then changed back. To me that is...I don't know what that is. That is extremely difficult. I think that if we get away from the

preconceived roles that we will get away from a lot of the problems around them... (personal communication, July 26, 2013)

I imagine that the look on my face revealed something to this interviewee because she immediately began to back pedal, “Um, that’s really simplifying it, you know, and I’m absolutely convinced that that there are a lot of people who are truly born in the wrong body, and I think there are a lot of people who are neither or both...God, I’m going to be so hated!” (personal communication, July 26, 2013).

Surely, this biological essentialism and refusal to accept trans individual’s own experience and identification contributes to the anger directed at lesbian communities, so often cited by these long-time coordinators at the Archives. Deb, a cofounder of the Archives explains that while older folks who identify as trans “understand that the Archives is not for them”, younger trans folks “fight us when we say we’re not going to neutralize our pronouns” (personal communication, July 10, 2013). According to several interviewees, the New York City Dyke March is an ideal site to witness this ongoing battle. Maxine, a member of the Dyke March Committee as well as the Archives Coordinating Committee explains,

So even at the Dyke March where we are open to trans women, we’re open to anyone who identifies as a woman, we have had people come to our meetings to tell us that women, that’s not a category that exists. They never say men is not a category that doesn’t exist. And you know, they try to disrupt the meetings and they say, so what’s a woman? My answer to that is, in a very nice way, if the word speaks to you, come to the Dyke March. If it doesn’t, don’t....I don’t get that! We have trans women on our committee. We are not transphobic! We just don’t want men there. (personal communication, July 25, 2013)

Another Archives coordinator argues that this anger from the trans community is misplaced and that it is the women’s and lesbian movements where trans folks have often found support.

I think there’s a lot of anger in the Trans community that is directed toward lesbians that don’t really deserve it. I look at my last pictures of the Dyke March and almost all of the signs are Trans but they’re against lesbians. They are about, we belong here too. And I think that is just amazing.

Amazing! I think that a lot of the trans community, and I'm not differentiating between trans queer, trans female, trans male, trans whatever, I'm just making it one big group. A lot of them, a lot of the community has found its possibility in the protection of the women's movement. Perhaps the gay man's movement as well, but I'm doubting that. (S. Smith, personal communication, July 26, 2013)

The fact that Saskia sees claims of belonging made by trans folks to be claims *against* lesbians warrants some attention here. In fact, I believe that much of the conflict boils down to this very belief—there is only so much room at the table and to invite others in to pull up a chair means to forsake those who worked so hard to build and set the table at the beginning. I return to this in the final section of the chapter.

To suggest that all Archives members hold these views of transgender individuals or the trans community would be a gross mischaracterization. However, there are some patterns that fall along generational lines. While the older, long term Archives coordinators that I interviewed largely hold the belief represented in the preceding pages, younger Archives coordinators and interns, those we might call the second and third generations of Archives affiliates, believe these views to be problematic and support greater inclusion of trans folks within the Archives. One second generation coordinator who is no longer affiliated with the organization spoke of her discomfort with the politics of exclusion present at the Archives in the 1990s and the changes that have taken place in regards to the Archives since then:

When I was fully engaged with the Archives there was the issue of the tensions between lesbian and trans identities visited, you know, visited upon us. I was with a group working through that and you know, it wasn't a perfect process. The Archives position now is different from what it was when we were working through it though. At the time I was thinking that, Oh! I might not be represented in this Archive if it sticks with this very narrow definition of what they're going to collect, you know, my friendship circle might not be recognized. (P. Thistlethwaite, personal communication, July 24, 2013)

In my search through the archive of the Archives I came across a set of Coordinator Meeting minutes from 1996 that are likely from the conversation Polly mentions in the above interview excerpt. These meeting minutes tell a story of a heated debate

surrounding the question of not only whose materials belong in the Archives' collection, but which bodies of which women belong in the physical space of the Archives as researchers or volunteers. The minutes indicate that the topic was raised in response to coordinators and visitors expressing discomfort at sharing space with transgender women volunteers. Some individuals in the room suggest that care be taken to separate personal feelings from organization policy, while others focus on the question of woman-only space, and whether self-definition is enough to determine who is a woman. Ultimately it is settled that organization policy will be one of self-identification as a woman. A handwritten addition to the typed meeting minutes states, "I worry that in going with the "self-identify at the door" policy we might inadvertently favor male-to-female people since some F-T-M people might feel uncomfortable declaring themselves women...I hope that we will continue to welcome very butch, "passing", and transgendered female-to-male people" (LHA, archive of the Archives, January 17, 1996 Meeting Minutes). Highlighting the complexity of such a conversation, the meeting minutes underscore how the self-identification policy put in place to encourage inclusion is a potentially exclusive policy for the "very butch," "passing," or "female-to-male" individuals already represented within the Archives. These 1996 meeting minutes represent the first and last explicit mention of such a conversation discovered through my archival research.

When asked to expand on the ways in which the Archives policies and thinking around trans issues have changed, Polly was unable to provide a concrete answer. In fact, even current coordinators and interns struggled to describe the changes that had taken place, despite the fact that the Archives were no longer a separatist space. One intern in her early twenties expounded on this topic of inclusion, "I think that's something the

Archives does struggle with— being trans inclusive and also being inclusive of male allies.”

She continued, “It definitely wasn’t designed to be trans inclusive. In the 70s. And how much it is today has to do with who you talk to and what you look at, you know, how you frame your questions when you come in” (Katie, personal communication, July 24, 2013).

Katie’s response was certainly true for my own experience with how interviewees responded to the idea of the Archives. It did depend on who I spoke with and how I framed my questions. Sometimes, in the space of a single interview, the Archives would be described as both inclusive and exclusive. Another intern in her early 20’s said,

I hesitate to be an authority or say super confidently like “oh the Lesbian Herstory Archives is trans inclusive” because like I said, there has been, um, fucked up things said in here by a coordinator...but then Meghan downstairs was responding to someone accusing the Archives of being transphobic and she was like, “oh my trans boyfriend is totally happy here and into the space” and so I guess it’s important to always give people the space to come up with their own opinions. But for people in academia to be like “raawwrr!! this is what I think!!!,” I’m really put off by that. (Courtney, personal communication, July 19, 2013)

Interns like Katie and Courtney describe being put on the defensive by friends (other queer twenty-somethings) who criticized the LHA. They point out that most of the criticisms come from people who had never stepped foot inside the Archives. Courtney continued:

And everybody kind of teases me. Especially my one friend. She’s like, it’s not an inclusive space. So they’re like, oh that’s weird! It’s only for lesbians? HAHAHA! And I’m like, well it’s a lesbian space but women who identify as bisexual, queer people, gender nonconforming people, trans, like it’s a space for a lot of people, but yes, it’s exclusive... (personal communication, July 19, 2013)

Here Courtney defends the space as being one for a lot of different kinds of people but also exclusive to lesbians. As Katie pointed out, it’s complicated. And it depends on who one talks to. It’s not possible to simply declare the LHA inclusive or exclusive of trans and genderqueer folks, for even as the LHA refuses to change their name or guiding principles to reflect and include a broader range of gendered identities, they open their doors to those same individuals who remain excluded from the organization’s name and publically stated mission.

This debate over trans inclusion and the question of whether woman-only space has a place in our contemporary LGBTQ communities is not limited to the Lesbian Herstory Archives or the New York City Dyke March. In fact, this debate has been ongoing for decades and is exemplified by the high-profile Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, and the protest alternative, Trans Camp (Serano, 2013; Gamson, 1997; Stone, 2009). Long before the highly publicized trans inclusion debate surrounding MichFest, however, lesbian feminist communities were struggling with questions of belonging and boundaries. Serano (2013) traces this history back decades:

It all started during the '70's and '80's, when a number of influential lesbian feminists began to trash transsexuals in their writings and theories. They argued that we propagated sexist stereotypes and objectified women by attempting to possess female bodies of our own. Eventually this all became unquestionable dogma, and transsexuals, even those who identified as feminists and dykes, were conveniently banished from most lesbian and women's spaces. (p. 23)

Similarly, Morris, a scholar of the feminist music festival community, locates the beginnings of conversations around community boundaries in the mid-70's: "The question of who belonged in this privately produced festival audience divided the community, beginning at the first National Women's Music Festival in Champaign, Illinois, in 1974" (2016: 71). It is fair to assume that the lesbian feminists involved in the debates surrounding inclusion at music festivals, as well as those involved in starting the LHA, were impacted by the anti-trans writings and theories Serano mentions above, hence developing their early understandings of trans identities in this way.

Serano points out that in the mid-1990's, as more and more folks who once identified as lesbians and dykes came out as trans, a growing acceptance of trans men was seen in lesbian communities. Despite this emergent acceptance of trans men, trans women, even those identifying as lesbians, were left without a home in the lesbian community. "These days, it is common to see the word "trans" used to welcome trans men (but not

trans women) on everything from lesbian events to sex surveys and play parties. And even at Michigan, women are no longer defined based on their legal sex, appearance, or self-identification, but on whether or not they were born and raised as a girl” (2013: 24).

Serano goes on to argue that this acceptance of female to male trans folks is often used to claim immunity to the label transphobic. The inclusion of trans lives within the LHA’s collections falls along this pattern. In 2006, an Archives coordinator completed a survey for a research project called, “The Politics of Gender and Ethnicity in LGBTI Archives and Special Collections”, indicating that the Archives had a “growing” number of collections primarily concerned with FTM²³ individuals, and “few” collections primarily concerned with MTF individuals. In another section of the survey the coordinator indicates that the LHA community and collection is “diverse, not exclusive,” and “expansive, not restrictive” (LHA, archive of the Archives, The Politics of Gender and Ethnicity in LGBTI Archives and Special Collections Survey). Years later, in 2013, when I ask my interviewees about trans-inclusion within the Archives holdings, the same couple of famous FTM individuals are mentioned as having a few papers or photographs in the LHA collection. This raises the question: does this inclusion of a few well-known trans men or masculine of center genderqueer artists and activists constitute a trans inclusive archives? Alternatively, is that even the goal of the Archives coordinators and community? Should it be?

²³ FTM refers to female-to-male trans individuals, while MTF refers to male-to-female trans individuals.

In Defense of the Bounded Community

To invoke community is immediately to raise questions of belonging and power.
-Miranda Joseph

According to one coordinator, community is “something that requires protection. It can easily not exist, and yet it does” (S. Smith, personal communication, July 28, 2013). She argues that in order to maintain itself, a community must define its borders and then protect them: “Part of why the Archives is important is because it really aids in that process of definition. Its existence allows a community to be what it is” (S. Smith, personal communication, July 28, 2013).

The founders and early members of the Lesbian Herstory Archives fought long and hard to establish a space for lesbian women. In chapter three I outlined this struggle, pointing to the importance of naming the organization as one for women, but more importantly, for lesbian women. Deb Edel, cofounder of the LHA, spoke passionately about this battle for lesbian space: “the real belief was, this was a lesbian organization.” She emphasized further by adding, “for, by, and about lesbians,” as she punctuated each word with her fist on the table. This was a strong position, one at the root of the organization’s founding, and it didn’t go uncontested: “And people said to us, why don’t you call yourself a women’s archives, or womyn, or wimmin, or wo-man...and we said No! Because if we do that, which is what a lot of people were doing, once again, we’re losing lesbians in the picture!” (D. Edel, personal communication, July 10, 2013). Others implored the founding members of LHA to consider collecting all materials relating to gay and lesbians, and not to limit the collection’s focus to lesbian women. Again, the women of LHA refused. Deb elaborates, “For the Archives, we really said yes, we’re happy to work in alliance with gay

men, but not as an organization. We're not going to say we're a lesbian and gay Archives. And that was very important to us" (personal communication, July 10, 2013).

Archives members that I spoke with recognize that to maintain a lesbian space requires the maintenance of community boundaries, which in turn requires the exclusion of those who do not meet the criteria set forth for belonging.

It's important for me to maintain the word lesbian, a lesbian aesthetic, maintain lesbian ideals and really embrace them instead of destroying them...but that comes along with issues of gender and issues of inclusion and exclusion, which I understand is the hot topic of today where people cannot exclude anyone and that's part of like, the new language of community building; it's like everyone is included. But I feel like community can only exist if there are like, boundaries or boxes or parameters or definitions. I'm a librarian; I need classification! That's important for me. I need to know when and where, how, for how long, what are we talking about? Who are we talking about? And then we can, once we have defined ourselves, then, we can connect with each other. But if we don't, if we're nothing, if we stand for nothing, then we'll fall for anything. (S. Smith, personal communication, July 28, 2013)

Shawnta's stance on the necessity of boundary maintenance for community preservation is reflected in community studies literature (Bean, 1971; Ehrlich and Graeven, 1971). In McMillan and Chavis' formative work they argue for the importance of boundaries in establishing community membership: "Membership has boundaries; this means that there are people who belong and people who do not. The boundaries provide members with the emotional safety necessary for needs and feelings to be exposed and for intimacy to develop" (1986: 4). This and other early discussions of community boundaries situate boundary maintenance and exclusion as necessary, if unpleasant, and all in the service of the greater good of community unity and purity. After all, "deciding who we are requires deciding who we are not" (Gamson, 1997:179).

In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist theorists and activists argued for the mobilization of identity-based community, believing in the power of collective action for social change (Gamson, 1997; Joseph, 2002). We can certainly count the Lesbian Herstory Archives

founding members among these activists. Contemporary identity theorists continue to recognize the advantage to strategic boundary maintenance and exclusion. Joshua Gamson explains,

In political systems that distribute rights and resources to groups with discernible boundaries, activists are smart to be vigilant about those boundaries; in cultural systems that devalue so many identities, a movement with clarity about who belongs can better provide its designated members with the strength and pride to revalue their identities. (1997: 179)

The LHA operates within these political and cultural systems and has benefited from the recognition of identity-based politics. However, as noted by Miranda Joseph in *Against the Romance of Community*, during this time writings by women of color and lesbian women of color²⁴ “raised doubts about singular identity categories as an organizing principle for social change”. She argues, “These works make it very clear that to imagine that women are a community is to elide and repress differences among women, to enact racism and heterosexism within a women’s movement that is so marked by a particular (bourgeois) class position that it cannot address the concerns of “other” women” (2002, xxii-xxiii). Just as this analysis can help us make sense of the reluctance of many women of color to become involved in the Lesbian Herstory Archives, it helps us to understand how a narrow focus on lesbians and the lesbian experience can lead to the exclusion of individuals who fall outside of the gender and sexual binaries. In an attempt to build and represent a unified lesbian community, the LHA contributes to the erasure of difference.

LGBTQ community scholars, while recognizing the purpose and function of community boundaries, must continue to interrogate these boundaries by paying attention to the ways in which power operates within communities to establish boundaries; who is in

²⁴ Joseph cites Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *This Bridge Called My Back*, Audre Lorde’s *Sister Outsider*, and bell hook’s *Ain’t I a Woman* as examples of such texts.

and who is out. Who defines the parameters of a community, and how can we think about these boundary-making processes as historical processes that change over time? I close this chapter with the following example of the historically shifting boundary-making processes seen at the Lesbian Herstory Archives:

In the Introduction, I wrote of an LHA postcard with the now-iconic image of a leather-clad, butch Deb Edel on its front side. The backside of the postcard contains a title, “Deborah on 8th Street, NYC,” and the words, “Evolution of an Image,” followed by a timeline:

1954- Totally Acceptable
 1964- Perfectly Understandable
 1974- Somewhat Questionable
 1984- Politically Incorrect
 1994- Role Model

At the time of the Archives founding in 1974, individuals and couples strongly identifying with Butch-Femme aesthetics, roles, relationship models, and patterns of desire would have faced the collective wrath of the wider lesbian-feminist community that had decided that Butch-Femme were passé representations of oppressive patriarchal forms. Deb and Joan, who were lovers when they founded the Archives, pushed back against this by forming a lesbian-feminist organization that not only accepted, but also celebrated Butch-Femme identities. In fact, Deb and Joan themselves embodied these identities and relationship forms that had been spurned by their larger community.

In Bonnie Morris’ *The Disappearing L*, she uses the example of the 70’s and 80’s disavowal of Butch-Femme to caution against contemporary queers’ dismissal of radical lesbian feminism and women-only space. In 1998, Alix Dobkin, a dyke musician and staunch supporter of women-only space, was boycotted and barred from performing at the

Philadelphia Dyke March due to her views. In a letter to the march organizers, Karen Escovitz, another lesbian feminist performer, wrote:

In the 70s, lesbian feminism took off, and all of a sudden, the old-school butches and femmes seemed old-fashioned. The new generation couldn't understand why they would want to take on those silly societally enforced gender roles and live their lives closeted and passing. The new generation could not understand their struggles, the doors the older dykes had opened, the way their struggles were connected. The old-school dykes were ridiculed and marginalized, excluded and shamed. And it was wrong.

The political fads of the day, the party lines, kept those feminists from really understanding their own history, and created deep divisions that have taken decades to repair. I sincerely hope that you will not repeat the mistake of disassociating yourself from your own history. You may not understand or agree with Alix's argument for women-only space any more than the 70s dykes understood or agreed with old school butch/ femme— but you can take advantage of the lesson we learned the hard way, and not repeat the same mistake (Morris, 2016: 189-190).

While I find this to be a strong argument, I would like to offer an alternative perspective when it comes to the case of the Lesbian Herstory Archives. As discussed in Chapter 3, LHA was founded in response to homophobia within the women's movement, sexism within the Gay Liberation movement, and perhaps also in response to the rigid gender expectations of lesbian-feminism. LHA was created as a space to celebrate gender diversity and sex positivity within the lesbian feminist community. Over time, faced with ever-expanding and fluid understandings of sex and gender, the same organization has struggled to navigate the strongly felt commitment to a specifically lesbian archive that will stave off erasure, while honoring the gender inclusive spirit of the Archives' founding. As Serano (2013) points out, queer and feminist communities are often created out of the need to establish safe and empowering spaces after experiences of exclusion. Ironically, "the movements and communities we create almost always end up marginalizing and excluding others who wish to participate" (2013: 2).

This chapter highlights the ways in which community is a complex phenomenon-fluid in nature and requiring frequent negotiation. Any attempt to universally characterize

community falls short, as the meaning and manifestation of community is constructed and reconstructed by an ever-changing assemblage of individuals responding to a shifting socio-political climate, and this is certainly the case at the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Smith-Cruz points out, “In a cyclical process, as lesbians entrust the Archives with their records and their engaged volunteerism, they develop and change the Archives; in response, the Archives is able to provide ever more complex points of access to lesbian identities and identifications” (2016: 215). In this way, the structure of the Archives is such that it supports ever-changing definitions of community and of the identity “lesbian”. In this chapter I look specifically at the community constructed at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, paying particular attention to the many points of strength as well as the various fissures apparent in the Archives community. Ultimately, it is clear that the community that coalesces around the Lesbian Herstory Archives is not a unified, but rather a fragmented community. It is a community struggling to redefine itself while staying true to its founding principles.

Despite its constructed nature, community can be a powerful force for personal and social transformation. In the following chapter, I shift the focus to the myriad ways in which the Lesbian Herstory Archives community has impacted the lives of so many individuals, while also leaving its mark on queer culture and paving the way for future queer history and archival forms.

CHAPTER FIVE: AT HOME WITH THE ARCHIVES?: CHANGING COMMUNITY DYNAMICS AND QUEER POTENTIALS

I make my way through countless folders of material detailing the day-to-day operations of the Archives. For hours on end I skim through budgets, early drafts of fundraising letters, short memos reminding collective members to clean up after themselves. Skim, jot a few notes, set to the side, skim, jot, set to the side. The process is almost meditative. Sometimes I come across a document or folder that pulls me back into myself- I feel my pulse quicken and I sit up straighter in my chair. I feel excitement, and something else that feels an awful lot like love, welling up in my chest. Today I sat for three hours hunched over a pile of yellowed handwritten letters- each one at least thirty years old. They represent hours of correspondence labor and love- my aching back perhaps mirrors their aching fingers. As I read their heartfelt words, I imagine that my aching heart reflects those of the letter writers. Reading of emotional turmoil, jealousy, heartbreak, betrayal, the 'blahs'- I see myself in those letters. I FEEL myself in those letters. I also feel a sort of longing. A desire for the intense emotional connections these women had. I feel the absence of a community of women who love and support and yes, call me on my bullshit. I envy the letter writers the urgency they felt, and hence the almost inhuman energy and capacity for work and writing and longing and love.

Today I came across a letter from the early 80's, addressed to Joan and Deb. In the letter, Judith expresses her hope that one day a "yet unborn dyke" would read over their correspondence and find pleasure in their love for and ease with each other. That unborn dyke is me; now, 30 something years later, a born dyke, a longing dyke.

For over forty years the Lesbian Herstory Archives has been a site of great personal transformation, as well as a space that offers consistency and security in a rapidly changing world—an anchor of sorts for lesbians and queer women, old and young. In this chapter I begin by outlining the many things LHA has been to many people: teacher, memorial, alter, collective, community, and last but not least, home. This section of the chapter delves more deeply into the ways in which the community that coalesces around the Lesbian Herstory Archives is often described in terms of queer family and kinship. In this way, the Archive becomes home, an attic full of memories, an ancestral tree, and a site for the transmission of oral history. My aim is for this section to read like a collective love letter—a potpourri of praise for an organization that has touched, and continues to touch, the lives of so many.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives, as home, has sheltered countless individuals as they've grown and aged, but sometimes home is as much about leaving as it is about dwelling. This chapter complicates the notion of home, and considers how, as we grow and change, the home that once held us safely might one day no longer serve us or meet our needs. Home here is intimately tied to a sense of community, and much of my research at the Lesbian Herstory Archives reveals widespread feelings of loss of community over time. In the second section, I draw on the community studies scholarship and consider this experience of community loss and its potential causes while highlighting some of the critiques of such a model. Here, I consider the role of emerging technology and digital media in shifting community forms. Arguing against techno-utopian and techno-dystopian approaches to effects on community, I rely on existing research to maintain that these technologies enhance rather than replace face-to-face community. The goal of this chapter then is to reflect upon and celebrate the past and present of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, while considering its future queer potential. After all, what is an archive if not a site for the simultaneous preservation of the past and imagining of the future.

To the Lesbian Herstory Archives, With Love

Without prompting, each of my interview participants devoted much of their discussion of LHA to detailing the many ways the organization has changed their lives, influenced their outlooks, and paved the way for their futures. For example, many participants highlighted the impact of the Archives as a tremendous source of knowledge about themselves and about the world around them. Saskia, who came to the Archives in the late 1980s, spoke of the educational impact LHA had on her:

I had no education at all, you know? No knowledge about how the world works, how society works... so to come here and to just immerse myself in all this, in all these

narratives and all this information...it gave me such an incredible picture, and kind of really brought all of my ideas and mostly my feelings to such...in such a way that made sense to me. (personal communication, July 28, 2013)

Another interviewee who served as an Archives Coordinator in the 1990s spoke of the unique research opportunities she encountered as a member of the Archives Collective:

That apartment gave me access to a variety of the queer press and I organized that collection and got to know the different kinds of periodicals and worked with the collections as they came in and saw the kinds of lives that people had led, and you know, I remember exploring and being amazed at how much political work white lesbians had done with the Panthers Party, or the anti-war, anti-violence activism that lesbians were involved in. (P. Thistlethwaite, personal communication, July 24, 2013)

Polly's early work with the Archives served to expose her to a wide range of activism and social justice issues, and more importantly, she was introduced to the imperative, intersectional work that her community of white lesbians had participated in, knowledge that continues to inform her work to this day.

Coordinators and volunteers throughout the Archives' history were intentional in making sure that the educational impact of the Archives was not relegated to those who had immediate physical access to the space. In the first six years of LHA's existence, a slideshow digitizing many of the Archives' holdings was "presented to over eighty groups as far north as New Hampshire, as far west as Kansas, and as far south as Virginia" (*Lesbian Herstory Archive Newsletter*, no. 6, 1980). An article about the periodical collection published in the 1995 issue of the Newsletter further imagined the far-reaching capacity of the Archives--an extract from it reads: "A young Lesbian from a small town in Maine who comes to visit the Archives a decade from now, for example, will be able to know that she's not alone, that there have been Lesbians in her area before her who have survived and gone about their lives" (no. 15: 8). Here we see the clear connection between the making of community and the making of history: as Archives members construct collections and slide

shows, they very literally craft and shape a collective lesbian herstory to share with an imagined community of lesbians around the world. As Derrida writes, “what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way” (1996:18).

While each of these examples looks back several decades, younger research participants note the continuing educational value of the Archives. Mai, a recent college graduate and visitor to the Archives, explained her excitement at learning of the LHA’s existence:

I was sooo excited! Oh my god! Because at that point I was doing this history project on homosexuality in the Renaissance and in that particular era especially, when you look for lesbian history, now there’s some, I’ve started to find some work, even on that era in lesbian history, but especially in the older books it’s all about gay men and there’s a little footnote that says there really are no sources about women in this period, you know? So you know, I was like reading this description saying we have all of this stuff and it’s all about lesbians, right, and it blew my mind! I was so excited! (personal communication, June 18, 2013)

Here Mai points to the male-centric nature of so much available historical knowledge, the exact impetus for the founding of the Lesbian Herstory Archives: to “uncover and collect our herstory denied to us previously by patriarchal historians in the interests of the culture which they serve” (LHA, Mission Statement, www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/history). Opportunities for exploration at the LHA are not relegated to academic-based research; in fact, some of the most powerful examples I received from my participants were ones relating to the capacity for personal discovery and growth. One Archives volunteer in her early twenties explained:

I came out as a lesbian very recently, like a year ago, and the Archives was then with me from that point forward. So, I have a very emotional connection to the space for that reason. I was like, ahhh! I don’t know anything about this. I don’t know the history. This is going to sound mushy, but I guess I learned my history. I’ve really learned my history. (Courtney, personal communication, July 19th, 2013)

Another intern describes her first visit to the Archives and how she headed straight to the subject files, locating information on butch/femme identities: "I was like, oh my god, my life! You know what I mean?" (Katie, personal communication, July 19th, 2013). In our contemporary culture where the face of the LGBTQ "community" is a white, cisgender male, for these young women the Archives serves not only as a source of information, but also as proof of their existence as queer, white women.

To find oneself within the archives is especially poignant for queer women of color who are often made invisible, not only in mainstream society, but also within majority white LGBTQ organizations and their histories. Moore et al. call attention to the fact that while recent decades have seen an abundance of rich studies of LGBTQ history, it is often the organizational activism of largely white, middle class lesbian and gay communities such as the Daughters of Bilitis, the Mattachine Society, and ACT UP, that leave behind "the archival paper trail through which their histories have been written" (2014: 3).

Alternatively, until recently, for the majority black and working class communities of Newark, New Jersey, "resistance to homophobia and heteronormativity was often enacted not through official activist groups, but through the formation of alternative communities: discos, ballroom houses, church-based communities, and other sites of solidarity and sustenance," often resulting in "an elusive, unrecorded history" (Moore et al., 2014:3).

The invisibility of Black lesbians in particular has been written about extensively by a handful of Black feminist scholars (Hammonds, 1994; Anderson, 2008; Gomez, 1983; Dunning, 2009; Jordan, 1992; James, 2011). In a scathing critique of the absence of Black lesbians in queer theory and gay and lesbian studies Hammonds writes, "Black women's sexuality is often described in metaphors of speechlessness, space, or vision, as a "void" or

empty space that is simultaneously ever visible (exposed) and invisible and where black women's bodies are always already colonized" (1994: 8). She goes on to point out that this invisibility is multiplied in the case of Black lesbians because their experiences are filtered through the lens of white lesbian sexualities, which "tends to obfuscate rather than illuminate the subject position of black lesbians" (1994:9).

In Chapter 4, I mentioned the story of Shawnta, a Black lesbian, whose experience at an academic conference reveals a lot about invisibility of black lesbians. She discussed how in that conference, several white women came to the agreement that "there were no Black lesbians in the seventies." Unsure of what she would find, if anything at all, Shawnta decided to use LHA's holdings to check up on this statement: "I just went into an African Ancestral subject file. One box...There was so much! I was hysterical. I was laughing and crying in hysteria! I was like; I can't believe I actually listened to someone saying there was nothing!" Shawnta explained to me what it felt like for her to find proof of her existence within the Archives: "It feels like you exist- in a way that you didn't know before. And so that moment is so powerful. It will transform someone (personal communication, July 28, 2013).

Asian-American lesbians seeking to combat invisibility experienced as queer, Asian-American women have also found the Lesbian Herstory Archives holdings to be a source of information and empowerment. An announcement from Asian Lesbians of the East Coast appeared in a 1984 issue of the Archives Newsletter and included the following statement about finding traces of Asian-American lesbians in the Archives holdings: "We weren't quite as invisible as we had thought. That's when we decided to start an Asian Lesbian History Project" (No. 8: 3). According to Yukiko Hanawa, Asian-American lesbian

invisibility stems in part from their construction as a model minority, which is considered as heterosexual:

In the racial/ethnic sexual discourse of the United States, the very queerness of Asian/Asian American queer subjects is often rendered invisible. It seems as though this polyglot, pantheistic, and polycentric “group” called Asian Americans, often identified (by others as well as by themselves) as a monolithic model minority, could not possibly include individuals with polymorphic sexualities among its members. (1997: 40)

Regardless of the source of invisibility, the negative outcomes associated with the lack of representation of oneself are myriad. As Moore et al. (2014) point out,

Most youth grow up without knowledge of the histories of people like themselves, or with the awareness that people like themselves even have a history. This absence of a grounding history, and this sense that they are nowhere reflected in the history they learn in school, can add to the alienation that gay youth experience simply by virtue of growing up in heteronormative families, communities, and religious traditions (p. 2).

For many, the Lesbian Herstory Archives provides the opportunity to locate oneself within history, and therefore to reaffirm one’s identity. As indicated above, this alone can be a powerful and transformative experience. Perhaps this is why lesbians from the United States and around the world have come to see LHA as a holy site (S. Smith, personal communication, July 28, 2013), or refer to their visit to the Archives as a “pilgrimage” (D. Edel, personal communication, July 10, 2013).

The Archives as a Path to the Future

In addition to providing individuals with opportunities for education and identity-development, research participants describe how the Lesbian Herstory Archives has paved the way for their futures, particularly in regards to their careers. Crysta, a university librarian and Coordinator at the Archives, credits LHA with influencing her decision to become a librarian (personal communication, July 29, 2013). In another interview, Maxine, a long-time Coordinator, told me about an Archives volunteer from “years ago” with whom she still maintains contact:

I put her on [transcribing] the tapes and she just couldn't fucking believe it, you know? Her life changed and she ended up moving to Denver—she's getting her degree in archival [studies]...that happens a lot. A lot of the people who decide to become librarians or archivists—it's because they've been to the Archives.
(personal communication, July 25, 2013)

In the span of a three-hour long interview, Maxine had mentioned three other individuals who began their archival careers at the Archives before setting out to start community-based lesbian archives in other states and countries. This influence extends to those who went on to work in institution-based archives as well. Eichhorn, author of *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, writes: "I was especially struck by the number of professionally trained librarians and archivists who cite the LHA as an important predecessor to their more orderly institutionally-based collections" (2013:50).

Current-day Archives interns and volunteers experience a similar pull to librarian and archival work as a result of their time at LHA. One intern speaks to the experience of feeling aimless upon graduating from college earlier that year, but sees the Archives as providing a sense of direction for her future plans:

Being at the Archives makes me more and more interested in archival work. Maybe just for the sake of being at the Archives for a longer time and being able to navigate better around the Archives and contribute better. See, I have these shaky commitments to various things. I'm just not sure. I'm figuring things out. The Archives has been a real anchor though.
(Courtney, personal communication, July 19, 2013)

A volunteer at the Archives echoed Courtney's sentiments explaining, "People ask why I want to do this kind of work and I'm like, oh, because I like the Archives! It feels like someplace I want to be for a long, long time, and it has directed my career interests" (Katie, personal communication, July 24th, 2013). For these young people faced with seemingly countless possible paths, the Lesbian Herstory Archives serves to narrow their focus and

provide a guiding foundation. As one interviewee puts it, “you can’t help but get an imprint like that” (P. Thistlethwaite, personal communication, July 24, 2013).

The Archives as a Bridge to the Past

A shared emotional connection is based, in part, on a shared history. It is not necessary that group members have participated in the history in order to share it, but they must identify with it. –McMillan and Chavis

While the Lesbian Herstory Archives has been an important source of future direction for so many, the organization also encourages meaningful connections to the past. One Archives visitor struggled to describe how, for her, the collection brings lesbian history to life:

In my memory space, I can hear voices that I didn’t actually hear. Like...(long pause) like some of the physical archives were coming alive with these voices. There was clothing, there was maybe a vest or something, like a jacket that was hanging up that I just saw, like I could see in my mind’s eye someone wearing that in a Dyke March or like a Dykes on Bikes ride or something, I don’t know (laughs), like in the seventies or whatever. And I could hear, like, women chanting or yelling or making noise and it was almost like there’s this, like a palimpsest of archive in the space. Every single person walking through those doors in adding another layer of archive, the living archive. It’s a powerful feeling to be in that space. (Julie, personal communication)

A central argument in Ann Cvetkovich’s book, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, is that this affective power is central to the queer archive: “Lesbian and gay history demands a radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism—all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive (2003:241).” The LHA Brooklyn brownstone is bursting at the seams with non-traditional materials and ephemera, like the decorated motorcycle vest that Julie remembers as she reflects back on her time at the Archives. Cvetkovich defines ephemera as “the term used by archivists and librarians to describe occasional publications and paper documents, material objects, and items that fall into the

miscellaneous category when being catalogued" (2003:243). In addition to books, periodicals, photographs, newspaper articles, letters, and other more traditional archival items, the Archives' holdings include a large t-shirt collection, assorted dildos, a political button collection, musical instruments, framed photographs, and other sundry items of importance to individuals or groups. According to Daly (2016), ephemera serves to trigger affective response, particularly for those underrepresented in traditional archives, because "ephemera evoke activities in which ordinary people choose to engage, in their everyday lives and in the extraordinary moments they experience or, better, orchestrate". In this way, "people whose perspectives and transactions are not typically recorded in archives have special relationship with ephemera" (p.86). In other words, ordinary individuals see themselves reflected in the ephemeral, hence experience an emotional response born of recognition. Both the contents of the Archives and the actual archival structure that houses the collection are intended to evoke emotion and inspire communal memory, which in turn serve as a bridge linking past, present, and future. In the words of Cvetkovich, "organized as a domestic space in which all lesbians will feel welcome to see and touch a lesbian legacy, LHA aims to provide an emotional rather than a narrowly intellectual experience" (2003:241).

This communal memory and connection to the past is not only facilitated by the materials housed within the Archives, but also through the stories told of past lesbians whose legacies are kept alive by LHA. In issue 16 of the *Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter* published in 1996, an intern shares her experience of bringing lesbian history to students at her Alma mater:

This fall, I brought an Archivette and the slide show to Smith College. There are slides of Mabel in the show and we told a little bit about her life and her forty year love for Lillian.

After the show a friend of mine looked at her lover. “Forty years,” she said, “do you think we could do that?” She said she never sees that- women together for that kind of a life. The Archives, for me, is that possibility. It is the sense of intergenerational community and a sense of the possibilities for making and living a life connected to women. (No. 16:8).

For the young woman in this story it is through learning of lesbians of the past that she is able to imagine her own future as a woman who loves women. A poem written by Joy Rich, an Archives Coordinator in the nineties, further highlights the role of the LHA in connecting lesbians from the past, present, and future:

To The Archives, In Her New Home

*In memory of the voices we have lost,
To sustain and protect the collective voice we have gained,
The Lesbian Herstory Archives was envisioned-
Born of our joy and sorrow, our pleasure and pain.*

*She holds the narratives of our hopes and setbacks,
The chronicles of our self-love and self-doubt,
The epic tales of women loving women,
The sagas-long and short- of coming out.*

*In her magazines, diaries, books, and videos,
In her short stories, music, art, and poems,
We can look at ourselves, each other, and our universe.
We can learn about queer lives, loves, jobs, and homes.*

*Here thrive the stories of butches and femmes,
Here breathe letters by all kinds of dykes.
Here flourish poems of our lust and our pride
And pictures we've taken of women on bikes.*

*For the love of lesbians all over the world,
For the living, the dead, and those not yet born,
Our culture is collected, preserved, and shared.
Come home to your herstory through the Archives' front door.
(Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter, No. 15: 8)*

The first stanza of this poem published in the 1995 issue of the Archives newsletter speaks of the LHA being born from emotion and queer trauma, “Born of our joy and sorrow, our pleasure and pain.” Rich’s poem signifies the Lesbian Herstory Archives as a site where

lesbians, past and present, come to know themselves and each other at the intersections of pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow, pride and shame. This aligns with Cvetkovich's assertion that through a radical archive of feeling, lesbian public cultures such as the Lesbian Herstory Archives, can move beyond medicalized and therapeutic healing-focused narratives of trauma "to present something that [is] raw, confrontational, and even sexy" (2003:4).

Undoubtedly, the Lesbian Herstory Archives is a site for memorialization, built with the express intention to "gather and preserve records of Lesbian lives and activities so that future generations will have ready access to materials relevant to their lives" ("LHA Statement of Purpose," *lesbianherstoryarchives.org*). This statement of purpose, crafted by the early founders of the LHA, relies on the assumption of a shared, collective identity, which is simultaneously maintained by and furthers the transmission of cultural memory. According to Kunow and Raussert, cultural memory "is a way to create a shared past within a community by providing a collective historical consciousness among its members" (2008:10). Constructing a lesbian lineage by honoring those that have come before is one manifestation of cultural memory within the Archives.

Beginning in the 1986 edition of the Archives newsletter, "In Memory of the Voices We Have Lost" becomes a recurring section of the newsletter where names, year of birth, year of death, and locations of lesbians who have died are listed. Referring to typical obituaries, the memorial section states, "Often in newspapers, a euphemism for the death of a Lesbian is 'There are no known survivors.' This is not true. ***We are each other's survivors***". The "In Memory of the Voices We Have Lost" section thus becomes a space of resistance, a queer memorial.

In some cases, photographs of those who have passed are included, and letters written to or from the dead are published alongside the notice of death. In one newsletter, a haunting letter written from the hospital bed of Bobbie Deming, a lesbian feminist author and activist, is published mere months after she succumbed to ovarian cancer:

To so many of you:

I have loved my life so very much and I have loved you so very much and felt so blessed by the love you have given me. I love the work so many of us have been trying to do together and had looked forward to continuing this work but I just feel no more strength in me now and I want to die. I won't lose you when I die and I won't leave you when I die. Some of you I have most especially loved and felt beloved by and I hope you know that even though I haven't had the strength lately to reach out to you.

*I love you. Hallowed be (may all be made whole). I want you to know, too, that I died happily.
Bobbie (Barbara) Deming*

Here the Archives as a site of memorial becomes not only a place for the living to remember and honor the dead, the traditional understanding of memorial, but it serves as an opportunity for the dying to actively curate their legacies, perhaps to construct their own queer obituaries of resistance. In my interview with Deb Edel, cofounder of the LHA, she spoke to this point:

One of the things that we've always said is that, well it's changing in terms of the number of women who have kids, but for many of us who don't have kids, this is a place to be memorialized, in essence. Just by putting the littlest thing here for yourself, a paper or, you know, a picture or something, where you say, "I am a lesbian. I was a lesbian. Hey future world, here I am!" (personal communication, July 10, 2013)

This sentiment is echoed by a previous Coordinator, Judith, now in her seventies and ill, who admittedly spends a lot of time thinking about dying and the legacy she might leave behind: "I just feel like it's terribly important to have—my history will be more honored and more treasured at the Archives than any other place.... Who else would want it, you know? Who else would ever think that I had something to say that was important?"

(personal communication, August 7, 2013). As a lesbian historian, Judith has firsthand

knowledge of what comes of lesbian lives and materials in mainstream archives- they are relegated to the far reaches of the archives' holdings, often unsearchable in the finding guides, and therefore unknowable. At LHA, those same lesbian lives are placed front and center, where they can be cherished by those making their pilgrimage.

The Archives Calling You Home

Memory speaks of and from a home and the cultural practices which we call "ours".
-Kunow and Raussert, 2008: 9

Gorman-Murray reminds us, "home is both material and affective- not only a physical location, but equally a matrix of shifting cultural associations and 'ideal' meanings" (2007:1). Since the normative western understanding of home has been intricately tied to the heterosexual, nuclear family (Mallett, 2004; Gorman-Murray, 2007), home is often a source of exclusion and pain for LGBTQ individuals. Despite this fact, the literature reveals the continued importance of home for LGBTQ individuals, who accept fragments of the normative construction of home, while resisting and creatively altering the heteronormative aspects of home (Elwood, 2000; Gorman-Murray, 2007).

The construct of "home" has always been central to the Lesbian Herstory Archives. The Archives was born in and rapidly overtook the home of its founders, Joan Nestle and Deb Edel, who wrote in the second Archives newsletter, "since the Archives is in the back room of one of our apartments a visit to it is also a sharing of our lives. Coffee, sometimes bread and cheese, and a jumping dog are part of the welcome" (No. 2:1). When the collection outgrew its first, shared home, it was moved to a four-story home of its own in Brooklyn New York. Despite its changing location and cubic dimensions, the Archives has always been referred to as "a home for Lesbians around the world" (LHA newsletter no.

10:7). The founding members were careful to maintain a comfortable, “homey” atmosphere, and to use the metaphor of home to describe the LHA at every turn. This characterization of the Archives as home to all has been largely successful, as each of my research participants—those calling the organization home for decades, and those who have visited just once—consistently turned to the metaphor of home as they spoke of the Archives. A visitor conducting research at the Archives explained,

When I visited the Archives for the first time, I had the sense that I had been there before, not in this exact building with its exact histories, characters, stairwells, old book smells, and ephemera on the walls, but in spaces like this one. I felt immediately comfortable, like I was coming home” (Violet, personal communication, February 2, 2014).

Many first-time visitors echo Violet’s sense that though she had only just arrived, it felt like coming home.

For the youngest generation of visitors to the Archives, volunteers, and interns, the metaphor of home is applied to the physical space of the Archives, while for the older generations home is found within the interpersonal connections built and sustained through the Archives. In other words, for the youngest generation, home is a physical place, but for the older generations home is an emotional and psychological feeling, an intangible and affective space. This reflects what Bryant (2015) refers to as the twin concerns of home in queer politics when he describes “the home as narrative metaphor and homes as real-world shelters” (1). One intern in her early twenties went to great lengths to describe the big, comfortable, purple couch in the main room, while another spoke of the kitchen where she could prepare her meals and sit to eat, thus indicating domestic comforts of this physical space. Several other young volunteers and interns reminded me that the fourth floor of the building actually was someone’s home. Ever since the Archives

moved to the Brooklyn Brownstone, a caretaker has always occupied the top floor of the building, both to watch over the collection and to provide a literal sense of home.

The juxtaposition between these accounts and those of the elder Archives members is clear. For example, an Archives Coordinator since the 1980's describes the LHA as home base—a place where she can go to be cared for and rejuvenated before going back into the world: “I’ve always felt like I need some home base that’s lesbian, and then I can do anything else—I can work with men, I can work with anybody else” (M. Wolfe, personal communication, July 25, 2013). Another long-time Coordinator describes reading Joan Nestle’s book, *A Restricted Country*, and feeling such a deep connection to the text and the author that she just knew that she had found her home: “I thought if that woman writes like that, and if she is like this, then that is a place where I will feel like home. So that was 1988 or 89. I’m still here.” (S. Scheffer, personal communication, July 26, 2013). Although the physical location of the Archives changed during Saskia’s time at the archives, she maintains that she is still “here”. Saskia refers not to a physical location, but to the Archives more broadly as a community, as a family, and as a home. On the other hand, young interns and volunteers who had much shorter histories with the LHA spent time describing the physical space of the Archives building and how the space made them feel at home.

Though the rhetoric of home here is largely deployed in positive ways that indicate deep connections to place and people, at times my research participants move beyond a mere romanticization of home. While the concept of home might be complicated for anyone, regardless of sexuality or gender identity, as mentioned earlier, for queer people the notion of home can be particularly fraught. For many queer-identified individuals, the family home becomes the opposite of what a home should be— a place of refuge, a place of

belonging, and full of warmth and love. In these cases, the home is something individuals are cast away from or flee²⁵. After discussing the Archives as a second home, one intern explained further, “But I’ve been thinking a lot about home and it not necessarily being a happy place, but like being a place where you can really work out important issues or thoughts. LHA is kind of like that” (Courtney, personal communication, July 19, 2013). Here Courtney is identifying the Archives as a place where one might work through past traumas or complex identities, an archive of feelings, if you will (Cvetkovich, 2003). Ultimately, the LHA is positioned in opposition to the family home. In a 1993 Archives Newsletter dedicated to the memory of Audre Lorde, Joan Nestle wrote,

[She] understood the need for homes both in the physical and cultural sense. She wrote about the homes that must be left and the ones that must be found...she was one of the few women who understood immediately why we would dedicate our lives to establishing a home for our collective story. (No. 14:2)

For many, the Lesbian Herstory Archives is the kind of home you flee to, not from- it is the family you choose. So, to the Lesbian Herstory Archives: you’re cluttered and crowded, and often a site where battle lines are drawn, but at the end of the day, there you are- waiting and welcoming us home. Thank you. With love.

The End of Community, As We Know It?

Despite the profound impact that the Lesbian Herstory Archives has had on the lives of those involved, many research participants indicate that over time they have experienced a loss of community as it relates to the Archives. In chapter three, “The Ageing Archives,” I laid out the shifting nature of community as experienced by long-term Archives community members. One coordinator spoke of the transformation from a large

²⁵ National studies indicate that 40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ. Data provided by the UCLA School of Law Williams Institute, 2012.

community of the past that, despite its size, was close-knit and intimate, to a smaller and more disparate contemporary Archives community (S. Scheffer, personal communication, July 26, 2013). Another coordinator agreed, pointing out the difference in relationships between those connected to the Archives: where once the community was all-encompassing for those involved, now a clear distinction between personal and professional lives and relationship exists. According to Maxine, current Archives community members share positive and productive working relationships, but their more intimate relationships, like those between friends or lovers, are kept separate from the organization (personal communication, July 25, 2013). These feelings of loss or lessening of community are supported by more concrete changes in community engagement with the Archives. At the time of data collection, financial support for the Archives was at an all-time low, the number of volunteers had dropped, and attendance at LHA events was lower than in previous years. This shift raises important questions about the Archives: How can we make sense of these changes? Is the community that once existed at the Lesbian Herstory Archives disappearing all together, or is the form and function of the community shifting to meet contemporary needs? In the following section, I turn to community studies scholarship to address these questions.

Concern surrounding the supposed loss of community is not new, in fact, social scientists have been writing extensively about community's inevitable decline since the late nineteenth century (Meltzer, 2013; McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Crow and Allan, 1995; Wellman, Boase and Chen, 2002; Driskell and Lyon, 2002; Lee and Newby, 1983). In 1887, Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* identified two types of social relationships. One, *gemeinschaft*, is centered on intimacy and interdependence, while the

other, *gesellschaft*, is based on indirect, impersonal relationships. Tönnies believed that as societies become more modern and complex, social relationships become increasingly impersonal, shifting from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*. This shift inevitably leads to the loss of close, intimate ties between individuals (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, 1887). Subsequent early analyses of social relations engaged with and expanded upon Tönnies' typology, though always maintaining the integrity of the one directional shift towards loss of community (Meltzer, 2013). For the better part of two centuries, scholars agreed, "the quantity and quality of community is reduced when a society becomes more urban, more industrial, more *Gesellschaft*-like" (Driskell and Lyon, 2002).

Critics of the loss of community perspective contend that *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* were intended as ideal types, or as "hypothetical, extreme constructs, existing solely for the purpose of comparison with the real world" (Driskell and Lyon, 2002). In this way, *gemeinschaft* is merely an idealized version of social relations, and any actual real community will fall short. Adhering to the *gemeinschaft/gesellschaft* community typology necessitates a loss of community model. This ignores modern community forms such as non-localized communities, symbolic communities, fragmented communities, and networks.

A particularly powerful critique of community as necessarily tied to locality comes from cultural geographer Jen Jack Gieseeking who argues that communities based in neighborhoods, defined as physical territories, "walkable in scale," and "dominated by residential uses," are not equally possible for all groups (2013: 180). While historically, urban LGBTQ neighborhoods have been essential to the well-being, safety, and community building of LGBTQ individuals, "[not] all LGBTQ people will be granted equal access and can

politically and economically maintain such properties over time” (Giesecking, 2013:179). For example, lesbians and queer women are unable to secure and maintain the same kind of territorial neighborhoods that gay men can; however, this does not stop them from identifying with and around differently spatialized communities. Giesecking uses the example of Park Slope, Brooklyn, incidentally the neighborhood in which the Lesbian Herstory Archives is located, to argue that “the meaning and survival of Park Slope is not predicated on retaining physical territory...rather it is derived from the mobile, fragmented, fleeting social, cultural, historic, economic, and political elements of a neighborhood” (2013: 179). Giesecking calls for a queering of the LGBTQ neighborhood, asking us to think “against the grain of normative paradigms of property ownership-as-success, in order to address the experiences and concerns of women, working class people, and people of color” (179). If we continue to apply rigid definitions of community to lesbian and queer women’s social formations, the loss of community perspective only serves to make these alternative community formations invisible.

While Tönnies’ *gemeinschaft* indicates that true community is predicated on unity and longevity, scholars call for a more inclusive definition that recognizes the fleeting and fragmented nature of many contemporary communities (Warwick and Littlejohn, 1992; Crow and Allan, 1995; Kenyon, 2000). Crow and Allan (1995) assert “community is not a static and fixed entity,” in fact the growth, subsequent passing, and potential rebirth of some communities are closely tied to structural conditions that shift over time (155). They use studies of community during coal strikes to argue, “community in this sense is more of an episodic happening than a permanent, fixed thing” (155). In these instances, the strikes provided a cause for individuals to come together around and form a community of

resistance. Once the strikes had ended, such cause-based community was hard to sustain. In this case, the loss of community perspective would acknowledge the loss of the strike communities without recognizing future potential for the emergence of community around similar issues.

In this vein, Kenyon posits that idealized characterizations of community fail to recognize its often-fragmented nature: “Community can be distinguished both by unity and/or fragmentation and difference. Again, this may oscillate over time, but to ‘lose’ or fall short of solidarity need not mean that community itself is lost” (2000:23). In fact, Kenyon goes on to claim “if we continue to classify communities as static and harmonious entities that will fit into geographical, social or identity categories, they will undoubtedly continue to appear too discrete in their make-up to be studied or compared in a useful way” (2003:23). Hence, the loss of community perspective inhibits useful sociological analysis of modern community forms, and it discounts the fact that communities are often sites of contention, conflict, and negotiation.

Wellman, Boase, and Chen (2002) argue that contemporary community research indicates that modern social life should be characterized less as community and more as “networked individualism” (p. 152). They further elaborate: “Our social systems—at work and home and elsewhere—have moved from being bound up in hierarchically arranged, relatively homogeneous, densely knit, bounded groups to being social networks...[where] boundaries are more permeable, interactions are with diverse others, linkages switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies are flatter and more recursive” (p. 160). Wellman, Boase and Chen point out that the catalyst for the shift from community to networked individualism has been technology, namely, the Internet. Recognizing that the

loss of community perspective has always centered on the impact of technology on communal ties, the authors aim to change the conversation from one of loss of community to one of changing community forms.

According to Simona Rodat, “the technology of the World Wide Web, perhaps the cultural technology of our time, is invested with plenty of utopian and dystopian mythic narratives” (2014:429). Those highlighting the negative impact of the Internet argue that it threatens community due to its immersive nature (Wellman, Boase, and Chen, 2002), and that heavy users lose contact with their real life communities of friends, family, and neighbors, leading to isolation and alienation (Kraut et al., 1998; Nie and Hillygus, 2002).

On the other hand, advocates of the Internet’s positive impact on social relationships claim that cyberspace allows for the creation of alternative, “spatially liberated” and “socially ramified” communities: “The virtual community allows participants to increase both the number of community ties and the diversity of the people whom they encounter” (Driskell and Lyon, 2002). Many scholars point to the particular usefulness of virtual communities for marginalized individuals, such as those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (Burke, 2000; O’Riordan and Phillips, 2007; Friedman, 2007; Hanckel and Morris, 2014; Rawson, 2014). For these groups, cyberspace is imagined as “an ideal environment,” that serves as a “virtual lifeline” (Stein, 2003:183). Scholars of online queer communities recognize the role of these (cyber)spaces in positive identity formation (Burke, 2000; Friedman, 2007; Rodat, 2014), and as a site for locating potential sexual and romantic partners (Burke, 2000; Friedman, 2007). Online communities are central in reaching LGBTQ individuals who live outside of urban centers and who have no or little physical access to services or social opportunities (Burke, 2000; Friedman, 2007).

Finally, as Gieseeking (2013) points out, physical space for lesbians and queer women is hard to come by due to social, political economic factors. Even when a physical space is obtained, Friedman explains, “lesbian groups, whether social or political, have found it almost impossible to maintain [them]” (2007:795). Moving groups and communities online can offer a more stable and affordable option.

Ultimately, research on the impact of the Internet on community tells us that these offline/online, real/virtual binaries are quite useless, and that the Internet doesn’t merely weaken or enhance community; rather, it transforms community all together (Wellman, Boase, and Chen, 2002, Driskell and Lyon, 2002). Individuals are not choosing between online and offline communities but the two merge in interesting ways. Large-scale data reveal, “The Internet may be a catalyst for creating and maintaining friendships. Users report that the Internet has had a modestly positive impact on both increasing contact with others and communicating more with family” (Driskell and Lyon, 2002: 385). These findings are supported by studies of LGBTQ online communities as well: “Relationships that begin online rarely stay there, and online forums are good places to make acquaintances, friends, or to meet potential partners” (Burke, 2000). In their study of queer Australian youth and their participation in an online community, Hanckel and Morris find,

a symbiosis between the online and offline worlds. The offline experiences of the users clearly shape their underlying motivation for connecting to this online community and also shape the online discussion. In turn, their experiences online often reduce the loneliness they face in their everyday lives and the advice they receive provides them with strategies to deal with the marginalisation they face. (2014:883)

Arguably, as digital technology continues to advance and the lines between online and offline continue to blur, the way scholars imagine, study, and theorize community will have

to expand to include a broader understanding of community formation and forms.

Returning to the case of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, how can we make sense the loss of community felt by research participants in light of the scholarship reviewed above? Furthermore, what role might technology play in the shifting landscape of the Archives' community? If one were to adhere to Tönnies' ideal types of community, surely the Lesbian Herstory Archives would be an example of community loss over time.

Interviewees indicate that relationships among LHA members have become less intimate and more marked by impersonal but functional professional relationships. While Archives elders highlight their intense emotional ties to the organization and one another, newer members like the interns and volunteers that I spoke with, placed emphasis on professional development and career skills gained at the LHA. Furthermore, social interactions among community members have decreased over time. Archives members note a separation between the various aspects of their lives: personal, work, and Archives. Finally, as addressed in chapter four, "Contested Communities," the current day Archives community is more marked by difference and fragmentation than by sameness and unity. Research participants who suggested a loss of Archives community over time seem to be adhering to classic notions of community; ones predicated on geographic location, homogeneity, intimacy and interdependence.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives Online

The March 1999 Archives Newsletter proudly proclaimed, "LHA enters cyberspace" (No. 17, 1999:5). The original website included research tools such as pathfinders and bibliographies, descriptions of the various collections housed within the Archives, and digital exhibits of lesbian herstory. Despite its early entry into the online world, the

Lesbian Herstory Archives has a complicated relationship with technology, ranging from a desire and willingness to use new technologies and social media interfaces to reach the widest possible range of individuals, to a reluctance surrounding the use of email instead of face-to-face meetings of the Coordinating Committee.

Recognizing the need to keep up with shifting forms of communication, the Lesbian Herstory Archives has adjusted their outreach practices to maintain and expand their connection to lesbian and queer communities. Deb Edel, who cofounded the LHA nearly three decades before the birth of social media, explains the shift in outreach from physical mail to electronic mail and social media communication:

We are on Facebook and email- so we're reaching out to people in different ways. And that's another thing—our mailing list, as opposed to our email list which is growing, our mailing list has probably gone from ten thousand down to about four thousand names with people moving but not sending us new information. So when we do a mailing, including fundraisers, it's to a much smaller group of people and we get very small responses. (personal communication, July 10, 2013)

A challenge that arises from this shift from physical to electronic mail is that despite the fact that fundraising emails can reach many more individuals, and at essentially no cost to the organization, donations received in response to those emails are minimal in comparison to past physical mail fundraising campaigns. In a time where the average American is buried in a sea of emails²⁶, it's easy to overlook just another email from an organization asking for money.

For the Lesbian Herstory Archives, Facebook is the platform of choice for the organization when it comes to having a social media presence. The LHA has a relatively

²⁶ 205 billion emails sent per day worldwide in 2015, and in North American, the open rate for email sent is only 30.6%. <http://www.radicati.com>

active Facebook page with 18,287 likes, 335 check-ins, and 49 reviews²⁷, the bulk of which are extremely positive. The Facebook page includes an updated calendar of events, information about the organization, photos and articles of interest, calls for donations of books and other material, and memorial posts in honor of lesbians and queer women recently deceased. Individuals who have “liked” the page are able to comment and interact with the various posts, thus providing a dynamic site for social interaction.

The last issue of the Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter was published in Spring of 2004, but in many ways, LHA’s Facebook page has taken over the role of the physical newsletter. Where once the newsletters contained reprinted letters sent to the Archives, individuals can now comment on and discuss articles and photographs in real time. In the past individuals might call the Archives for information regarding upcoming events; now they can log on to Facebook to see a digital calendar. Instead of travelling to Brooklyn, New York to walk through the many rooms of the Archives, individuals might scan through photographs and accompanying descriptions from the comfort of their homes or a local coffee shop. As indicated in the previous review of the scholarship on the impact of technology on community, whether this is a positive or negative development is hotly debated. However, several of my younger research participants did provide examples of online communities when asked to identify communities to which they belong. Jay, a volunteer in her early thirties, offered: “So you know, like my Facebook community. We’re gathering together on Facebook to kind of talk shit out and call each other out, you know?”

²⁷ “liking” an organization’s page enables their posts to show up in the individual’s newsfeed thereby exposing them to the content shared by the organization. Check-ins take place when an individual indicates (usually from a mobile device) their location. In this case, individuals are letting their followers know they are at the Archives. Reviews enable individuals to rate the organization and provide comments about their experience.

Give each other feedback. So, I think that's also a community" (personal communication, August 3, 2013).

Interestingly, while the organization does not have an official Twitter or Instagram account²⁸, it maintains a somewhat active presence on each platform due to the many tweets or posts, by unaffiliated individuals, that mention the Archives. For example, on Instagram, 205 posts include the hashtag²⁹ #lesbianherstoryarchives. Users can also use the embedded GPS technology to tag the Lesbian Herstory Archives in their posts. In this way, social media users are demanding and co-producing an LHA online presence, with or without the help of those running the organization.

While recognizing the utility of social media and other digital technologies, some of the Archives elders lament the increasing use of email in place of face-to-face communication. There are two current Archives Coordinators that do not live locally and most of their participation in the LHA's day-to-day operation takes place via email. For example, Joan Nestle, an original founder of the organization, lives in Australia but still participates in the governance of the LHA via email. A long-time Coordinator argues that the shift to email communication has significantly changed interactions:

Because you had to sit around the table to do it, you know? So you're stuffing envelopes, you're having a conversation, you're filing stuff, you're having a conversation, you're doing stuff, you're tired, and you go out for dinner afterwards. Now it's via email. Don't get me wrong, I applaud the possibilities of email, but it changes the interactions. (S. Scheffer, personal communication, July 26, 2013)

²⁸ In December of 2016, LHA joined the world of Instagram with an account of their very own!

²⁹ Hashtags turn any group of words proceeding it into a searchable link on various social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram. This helps to organize content and spark topic based discussion. <http://mashable.com/2013/10/08/what-is-hashtag/#BEjMxt2M8kqW>

While email allows for a greater number of people, near and far, to participate in the LHA's operation, the very nature of the community built around the organization changes from one of close, intimate ties, to one based on marking off items on a checklist. This does not preclude solidarity or support among members altogether, rather it likely makes such connections more tenuous and fleeting.

Most of the concerns surrounding the impact of technology on the Archives' community come from the organization's elders. One Coordinator in her sixties worries about what the shift to email communication means for the older members of the organization: "the older people, you know, the generation above me is not that fast and not that comfortable with getting into new ways of communicating. They also don't want to sit at the computer, you know?" She goes on to highlight the consequences of leaving this older generation behind: "So that means that a whole lot of historical organizational knowledge is disappearing. A whole lot of organizational interaction is disappearing" (S. Scheffer, personal communication, July 26, 2013). The challenge is clear: while failing to enter the world of social media and digital communication means missing out on opportunities to connect to a younger generation of lesbians and queer women, to shift all organization interaction in this way means risking the alienation of older, long-term Archives members and losing their vast knowledge of the organization and lesbian/queer history in general.

While there is something of a generational divide evident in the data-younger members report finding community online and older members worry that a shift online could mean the end of the Archives community all together-all research participants

recognize the importance of the physical space of the Archives. One Archives visitor in her early thirties explains,

I suppose I'm a part of the broader LGBTQ community, though living in Michigan I feel pretty disconnected from it most of the time. Of course, there's the Internet—tumblr is a place I go to learn from radical queer people, except it makes me feel old—and there are blogs and resources online and such, but I miss the drop-in center now that most of us have aged out and moved on. I miss having a centralized, queer place to go where there would be people to share joys and struggles with. (Violet, personal communication, February 2, 2014)

For Violet, though she turns to online spaces for information, encouragement and resources, she still craves face-to-face contact, and real life comrades with whom she can share her life. This aligns with studies that find that “most Internet users appear to be seeking information rather than social support,” and that online spaces do not serve to replace face-to-face communities, rather they can supplement them (Driskell and Lyon, 2002). A twenty-something volunteer at the Archives spoke specifically to the importance of the physical space of the Archives for those living in locations without visible lesbian/queer communities:

Spaces like the LHA are important as physical gathering spaces. Even though a lot of archives are moving online, I really feel like maintaining a physical space is important for people who don't live somewhere where lesbian/bi/queer women's communities are super visible and therefore don't often get to interact in person with a large collection of community ephemera and stories. (personal communication, August 5, 2013)

While an online community might temporarily stand in for an in-person community in such areas, according to this volunteer, these individuals still need a place to go where they can find “their people”.

In addition to the use of email and social media for communication and outreach purposes, over the past eight years the Lesbian Herstory Archives has begun a concerted effort to digitize and make public some of their collections. In 2008, the LHA Coordinating Committee partnered with a professor at the Pratt School of Information and Library

Sciences. Students enrolled in Professor Anthony Cocciolo's digitization course created a website and began digitizing some of LHA's audio tapes including a series of interviews with Archives elders and founders Joan Nestle and Mabel Hampton, and the public speeches and readings of Audre Lorde. Archives volunteers led by Coordinator Saskia Scheffer began work on digitizing the LHA photo collection in 2010, an enormous undertaking that continues today (McKinney, 2015), and the entire collection of LHA newsletters has recently been digitized and made available on LHA's website, www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org. This shift towards digitization begs the question, what impact might this move towards digitization have on the Lesbian Herstory Archives and the community it has fostered over the years?

"Among the most deep-seated anxieties of the Internet age is the fear of technologically produced forgetting" (MacDonald, Couldry and Dickens, 2015). Memory scholars and technology critics alike argue that the digitization of everyday life leads to "overwhelming flows of information," which are "undermining our ability to connect and synthesize past and present" (MacDonald, Couldry and Dickens, 2015). According to these detractors, an organization predicated on the construction and preservation of collective memory would be adversely impacted by digitization. In contrast, based on a case study of a north England civic organization's digitization efforts, MacDonald, Couldry and Dickens (2015) assert, "digital technologies (image and audio capture, storage, editing, reproduction, distribution and exhibition) have become embedded in wider memory practices of storytelling and commemoration in a community setting" (p. 103). The digitization of materials can lead to incredible transformations in terms of access, interpretation, and use. In the case of LHA, their digitization efforts aid in supporting their

goal of reaching all lesbians and queer women, regardless of geographic location. Those accessing the digital collections have the freedom to interpret materials in unique and meaningful ways, and may produce new forms of collective memory. In theory then, the Archives as a cultural site of memory and history, can truly be of, for, and by the lesbian community.

Earlier in the chapter I posed the following question: Is the community that once existed at the Lesbian Herstory Archives disappearing all together, or is the form and function of the community shifting to meet contemporary needs? I would argue that the latter is true. LHA still attracts committed volunteers and interns, and the flow of visitors to the space remains steady. The organization continues to work to adapt to a changing political climate and rapidly advancing technologies, and while LHA still faces challenges, these challenges are not unique to LHA, but are experienced by other LGBTQ heritage organizations as well³⁰.

The preceding pages honor over four decades of the Lesbian Herstory Archives' service to lesbian and queer communities by detailing its many contributions to lesbian lives and queer histories. I argue against the loss of community model, proposing instead that the Lesbian Herstory Archives is experiencing a significant shift in the communities it serves and in how it serves them. Shifting away from a model of loss, which suggests continued depletion and an eventual end, allows for the consideration of future possibilities- queer potentials.

In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Muñoz draws upon the queer past in order to imagine a queer future. He writes, "The future is queerness's

³⁰ Two such NYC-based organizations that the author has found to experience similar challenges are The Pop-Up Museum of Queer History, and Outhistory.org.

domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see the future beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*" (2009:1). This, for me, is the crux of queer potential: always striving, never quite arriving, yet always reaching for all that exists beyond mere inclusion, visibility, and acceptance. The Lesbian Herstory Archives' forty-plus year journey has been a practice in queer potential. Ultimately, I contend that the Lesbian Herstory Archives, despite, and perhaps as a result of, its ageing building, collection, and constituency, is a site of queer potential where radical archiving practices meet lesbian-centered politics for the purpose of realizing something more.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

*Last April I was in Seattle for an academic conference, and after a long day of attending sessions I made my way down to Pike Place Market to be a proper tourist. As I headed toward the famous red “Public Market Center” sign, I weaved my way through couples holding hands, groups of friends laughing, and mothers pushing strollers—I was hyper-aware of my aloneness in that moment. To my right, a small, unimposing sign caught my eye: “Left Bank Books”. Kate Bornstein’s *Gender Outlaw* faced out of the front window, and so I ducked in to what I had quickly decided was my kind of place. Besides, one is never alone if they have a book in their hands, right?*

The walls of the bookstore were plastered with posters celebrating a people’s history: anarchism, solidarity with undocumented folks, disability rights, etc... I stood for several moments, scanning the walls and straight up shrieked when my gaze landed on a bright pink Lesbian Herstory Archives poster. The poster featured an iconic image of Mabel Hampton holding one side of the famous LHA banner. The person sitting behind the cash register startled and looked up me. “Sorry,” I whispered. “I saw the Lesbian Herstory Archives poster and I freaked out!”. I explained a little bit about my research at LHA and the worker told me that while they had never been there, it was on their “bucket list”. We talked for several minutes more before I left with an armful of new books and a suggestion for a great drag bar. Smiling to myself, I thought about that interaction as I walked around the market. I was three years and three thousand miles away from Park Slope Brooklyn, yet the Lesbian Herstory Archives continued to speak to me, and to pave the way for fleeting moments of community and belonging.

In this concluding chapter, I reflect back on the previous chapters to highlight them as an ethnography of the creation, history, and continuation of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the oldest and largest lesbian archives in the world, and now an institution in western lesbian culture. Looked at through the frame of community theories and scholarship, this dissertation engaged a number of important questions:

1. How does archiving produce community? How is this production of community like or unlike other forms of community creating?
2. How does a community archive and project of collective memory, rooted in a specific identity and created in response to a particular set of social and political circumstances, respond to a radically shifting socio-political climate?
3. In what ways does the deployment of community produce boundaries of inclusion and exclusion? How does this take place at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, and why?

This conclusion outlines the major findings from each research chapter, as well as considers the project's contributions to existing scholarship in sociology, community studies, archival studies, feminist and queer studies. Finally, I provide some final thoughts in relation to the limitations and future direction of this work.

After introducing the project and significant theoretical frameworks in Chapter One, Chapter Two outlined my methodological approach to the research. In Chapter Three, I draw upon the case of the Lesbian Herstory Archives to explore how the act of archiving serves to produce community. From the very start, the LHA functioned as a site for the active engagement of self-defined lesbians in co-creating lesbian history and culture, and along the way, community. This chapter maps out how the changing Archives community mirrors the shifting socio-political climate of the United States. I suggest that the trope of ageing is useful in tracing the shifting archives community over time. I argue that ultimately, the creation and trajectory of a community organization is inextricably tied to the sociopolitical climate in which the organization exists, despite attempts to protect and isolate the organization from the outside world. Because of this, it is imperative to filter critiques of the organization through an understanding of its political and historical context.

Finally, Chapter Three examines the role of intergenerational communication at the Lesbian Herstory Archives. My research reveals that despite the fears of elder community members that the youngest generation is disconnected from a lesbian identity and unconcerned with lesbian history, young lesbians and queer women are deeply invested in the lesbian past, and they crave contact with older generations. The LHA becomes a site for

this contact., and it is this emphasis on intergenerational communication that reveals how archiving can create unique community forms.

In Chapter Four, I argue that community, as a rhetorical tool, is deployed by the Lesbian Herstory Archives in order to secure needed resources such as money, volunteers, and donations of materials to be archived. My research suggests that the power of this community rhetoric might be diminished over time as lesbian identity has become less salient and increasingly critiqued. This raises questions like: what happens when 'lesbian community' or 'lesbian culture' no longer exists in certain ways? How can it continue to be archived? Has LHA been, or does it have the potential to be, queered?

Chapter Four also reveals how, despite the best intentions of the founders, the rhetoric of community deployed by the Lesbian Herstory Archives has often relied on a falsely homogenizing understanding of community that is based on a universal lesbian identity construction. This has led to attitudes and practices of exclusion along the lines of race, class, and gender. Finally, in this chapter, I argue that LHA's insistence on creating an organization that centers women, specifically lesbians, stems from their history and the context out of which the Archives was born. This context has caused Archives' elders to feel the need to protect the Archives from a changing society where lesbian identity is arguably increasingly devalued and made invisible.

Chapter Five lays out the many ways that the Lesbian Herstory Archives has shaped lesbian lives, culture, history and scholarship since it's founding in the early 1970s. This dissertation joins a growing body of scholarship that places the LHA at the center of inquiry, and these projects mark a shift in figuring the Archives—from a space to keep and sustain lesbian culture and history, to a recognized lesbian institution in and of itself. Here

I suggest that the notion of community, while ambiguous and ripe for criticism, can be a powerful tool to mobilize individuals and groups. In the case of the LHA, a community organization-turned-lesbian institution was built and sustained over the course of forty-four years as a result of the powerful and intentional deployment of community.

Chapter Five also argues that the Lesbian Herstory Archives community can be understood through the lens of queer kinship—the organization and resulting community stands in as family and home for so many. Perhaps, this is another example of how archives might create unique forms of queer community. Finally, Chapter Five draws on contemporary community scholarship to suggest that while many Archives’ elders indicate feeling a loss of community over time, the Lesbian Herstory Archives is not doomed to extinction; instead, the LHA’s form and function continues to shift to meet changing community needs. At the end of Chapter Five I offer an answer to the earlier question of whether LHA has been or might be queered. I argue that the forty-four years of existence of the Archives has, in fact, been a practice in queer potential.

Contributions

As a whole, this dissertation contributes to the field of sociology by identifying the archive as a site worthy of sociological inquiry. The act of archiving is revealed as a social process whereby history is constructed, identities are forged, and communities are built and sustained. While sociologists have surely utilized archival holdings to gain insights into their research projects, the archive as subject has not been given considerable attention in the field. Additionally, this project contributes to the field of sociology by providing a clear example of the connection between biography and history as it pertains to one particular lesbian feminist organization. This dissertation traces a shifting socio-

political landscape and highlights the effects of such changes on an organization and its affiliated communities, making clear the relationship between social change and an organization's biography.

This project also contributes to sociological theories of social movements by providing a concrete case study to support more abstract claims about LGBT social movements. For example, in a recent overview of LGBT social movement scholarship, Ghaziani, Taylor, and Stone (2016) outline three cycles of LGBT social movements and identify the defining logics of each cycle. The LHA is an organization whose history spans all three cycles, hence my study provides a unique opportunity to assess and consider the concrete implications for this three-cycle model. In this chapter I use this model to analyze generational differences at the LHA, and to better understand their impact on the trajectory of the organization.

This dissertation project contributes to community studies scholarship in three major ways. First, this research adds to the discussion of the various types of community. While early community scholarship identified two types of community, one based on geography and the other based on attachment or relationships (Gusfield, 1975; Wilmott, 1989), it was determined that these two types were not mutually exclusive (Crow and Allan, 1995). In fact, contemporary community formations are much more complex than early community scholars imagined. My study of the Lesbian Herstory Archives is an exploration of multiple, complex, layered communities, existing simultaneously, always in flux. Second, this project engages the many critiques of identity-based community as exclusive, reductive, and normalizing, and suggests that while these critiques are valid, identity-based community can be a powerful source of resistance and change. In fact, my

interviewees see lesbian community not as a normalizing agent, but as an antidote to assimilation. So, while the concept of community is elusive and highly criticized, it is still powerful and central to the lives of many, and therefore it requires our scholarly attention. Relatedly, this dissertation complicates the commonly agreed upon queer critique of identity-based community as always exclusive. While my research reveals problems of exclusion at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, particularly around gender, it traces the history of the organization to provide context to the LHA's community boundaries, and it explores current day threats to lesbian identity and community as experienced by my interviewees.

This research engages an in-depth discussion of ageing bodies, identities, and organizations, a topic often dismissed by contemporary feminist scholarship (Cruikshank, 2013; Krainitzki, 2016). In addition, this project builds on the work of Whittier (1995), Eichhorn (2013), and other feminist scholars to further complicate the notion of generational feminism. My research at the Lesbian Herstory Archives affirms that while the generations model can be useful as an analytical tool, it is just that—an analytical tool. Generational categories are not discrete, and membership in a particular generation does not always determine one's outlook or political commitments. In fact, uncritically relying on a generational model of feminism can result in a proscriptive approach to feminist inquiry, deeming those of the older generations uninteresting or problematic.

My research also contributes to the field of archival studies simply by answering the call to move beyond “archive-as-source” (Arondekar, 2009). This study joins a growing number of scholarly endeavors to place archives at the center of empirical inquiry. Additionally, this project argues for the examination of grassroots archives as sites for the creation of community, and not just history.

Finally, this dissertation contributes to the field of queer studies by calling for an expansion of what we consider “queer”. This project presents the Lesbian Herstory Archives as a queer archive, despite its lesbian feminist roots, and its commitment to the distinct identity categories of woman and lesbian. The LHA is committed to archiving the ephemeral, and its organizational structure and radical archiving practices seek to disrupt and destabilize the normal. In discussing the relationship of the Lesbian Herstory Archives to ‘queer’, Giesecking (2015) writes,

The LHA can be read as solely a lesbian, feminist, and/or lesbian feminist project, as it continues to extol these politics and theories; indeed, the concept of “queer” as it stands today did not exist throughout half of the institution’s existence. Yet to consider “queer” [as] anachronistically unfitting erases the archive’s contribution to queer theory today as well as its work as a predecessor and ancestor to queer ideas and concepts. (p. 28)

Quite simply, Giesecking warns against throwing the baby out with the bathwater, and she suggests several ways in which the LHA can, in fact, be read as queer. Namely, the LHA is a site of what Giesecking calls queer “in/stability”: “both stable in its physical form and unstable in its sociality” (2015:25). The LHA is both a permanent home for lesbian history *and* a precarious project relying on sometimes unreliable donations and volunteer labor. In addition, “finding aids for many collections have yet to be written. Many records lack dates or location information, leaving the researcher’s search for lesbian history fragmented and unstable” (2015:27). As all lesbians are invited to coproduce the archive, the collections are always in flux. This binary challenging, simultaneous stability and instability, according to Giesecking, results in a “radically inclusive and useful space of growth and difference” (2015:27). Giesecking also reminds us that queering is often about exploding binaries. The LHA is not a site of stability or instability. It cannot be described as merely inclusive or exclusive. LHA is not either/or, it is both/and. It is a complex, fluid,

and ephemeral site of lesbian history making, enclosed by four strong walls, a roof built by lesbian hands, and a solid foundation.

Final Thoughts

To conclude, I would like to share my final thoughts regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this project, and to consider future directions for this work. My interdisciplinary approach to the exploration of the relationship between archives and community turned out to be both a strength and a weakness. Since this project engages with such a variety of literatures, it allowed me to explore the many facets of my research topic that provide a nuanced understanding of community, but prevented me from delving too deeply into any one literature and limited the specificity with which I could speak to any one set of ideas. Undoubtedly, this changed the direction and findings of my research. On the other hand, an interdisciplinary approach allowed me to bring two fields of study, sociology and archival studies, into conversation with one another.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of this project is that it represents and promulgates existing dominant narratives about the Lesbian Herstory Archives. I conducted my research within the organization and with the approval of the governing body. My gateway into the LHA was Deb Edel, a founding member, who provided me with my first interview at the site, and subsequent connections to others at the Archives. My interview with Deb not only set the tone of my research, but it signaled to others in the organization that I was “safe” and “friendly”. All ensuing interviews were conducted with individuals currently affiliated with, or still friends to the Archives. I did not seek out participants who were vocally critical of the organization, or those who had once been involved with LHA but left due to negative experiences. My archival research took place within the Archives and

therefore represents a dominant history carefully curated by the organization itself. Each research decision made during my time at the LHA contributed to the story I tell today—a story directed by the dominant narratives of the Lesbian Herstory Archives. This reality, however, suggests potential for future research: How might the story differ if told by those disenfranchised by the Lesbian Herstory Archives? Several participants spoke of trans individuals critical of lesbian organizations and woman-only spaces. What story might these individuals tell about their experience of the LHA? What insights might the women living in the shelter down the street that visited the LHA once, never to return, provide about the LHA or identity-based community?

Another interesting direction for future research would be to explore LHA's relationship to other New York City-based queer heritage sites. Originally, I intended for this dissertation to include an analysis of two other sites, outhistory.org, and the Pop-Up Museum of Queer History, but the Lesbian Herstory Archives' story took over and demanded time and space. Sites like the Pop-Up Museum of Queer History offer a noteworthy alternative to LHA in terms of its structure, approach to queer history, and intended audience. A comparison between these organizations might provide unique insight into queer history and community making.

The next time I make my way home to the Lesbian Herstory Archives, I will carry with me a box of materials to be added to the Archives collection. A printed copy of this dissertation will be joined by several notebooks full of my barely legible field notes, recorded interviews and their transcripts, typed memos, and annotated photocopies of each Archives newsletter. Like the women who have come before me, I will feel self-conscious about my donation—doubting that my little project means much to anyone but myself. Handing over that box will surely feel like baring my soul. I imagine that one day, a yet unborn dyke, will pull down that dusty box and find herself drawn in to the story I've set out to tell. Maybe she'll scoff at my analysis and imagine how she might have done things differently, better, but I bet she'll feel the love that pours out of every page.

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Certificate of Advanced Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, Syracuse University

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May, 2013

M.A. Sociology, Syracuse University

Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs

May, 2010

B.S. Sociology, Women's and Gender Studies, State University of New York, College at Brockport

College of Arts and Sciences

May, 2008

CURRENT PROJECT**Dissertation, successful defense on September 19, 2017***The Aging of the Archives: Community, Conflict, and Queer Potential at the Lesbian Herstory Archives*

Committee: Dr. Jackie Orr (chair), Dr. Gretchen Purser, Dr. Robin Riley, Dr. Roger Hallas, and Dr. Margaret Himley.

PUBLICATIONS**Book Review***Repudiating Feminism: Young Women in a Neoliberal World* by Christina Scharff. Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited. *Gender & Society*. April 2014:28 (2).

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Department of Sociology, Christopher Newport University

Lecturer

Sociological Theory
Fall 2015, Fall 2017

The Family in Transition (SOCL303)
Fall 2015, Spring 2016, Fall 2016

Socialization in Society (SOCL304)
Spring 2016, Fall 2016, Summer 2017

Identity, Community, and the Individual (SOCL205)
Fall 2016, Fall 2017

Sex, Sexuality, and Communication (COMM 430)
Fall 2016

Adjunct Instructor

Deviant Behavior (SOCL 319)
Fall 2014

Identity, Community, and the Individual (SOCL 205)
Fall 2014, Spring 2015

Department of Sociology, SUNY College at Brockport

Adjunct Instructor

Sociology of the Life Course (SOC395), Online
Fall 2012, Fall 2013

Sociology of Popular Culture (SOC395), Online
Spring 2014

Social Problems (SOC380), Online
Summer 2014

LGBT Studies Program, Syracuse University

Adjunct Instructor

Queer Bodies, Genders, and Identities (QSY 112)
Summer 2014

Teaching Associate

Queer Bodies, Genders, and Identities (QX 112)
Spring 2014

Queer Histories, Communities and Politics (QX 111)
Fall 2013

Department of Women's and Gender Studies, Syracuse University***Adjunct Instructor***

Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies (WGS101)
Summer 2011, Summer 2012

Transnational Feminist Studies (WGS201)
Summer 2012

Teaching Associate

Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies (WGS101)
Professor Himika Bhattacharya, Professor Robin Riley
Fall 2010, Fall 2011, Fall 2012

Transnational Feminist Studies (WGS 201)
Professor Robin Riley, Professor Jackie Cuevas
Spring 2011, Spring 2012, Spring 2013

Department of Sociology, Syracuse University***Adjunct Instructor***

Introduction to Sociology (SOC101)
Summer, 2011

Teaching Associate

Introduction to Sociology (SOC 101)
Professor Richard Loder
Fall 2009, Spring 2010

Department of Women's and Gender Studies, SUNY College at Brockport***Adjunct Instructor***

Feminist Theory (WMS409/509)
Summer 2013

PRESENTATIONS**"Contested Communities at the Lesbian Herstory Archives"**

August 13, 2017, Society for the Study of Social Problems Annual Conference
Montréal, Canada

“Paving the Way to Forgotten: Progress, Invisibility, and the Ageing of the Lesbian Herstory Archives”

August 15, 2017, American Sociological Association Annual Conference
Montréal, Canada

“The End of Community As We Know It?: Interrogating ‘Loss of Community’ Perspectives in Relation to LGBTQ Community Archives”

February 26, 2017, Eastern Sociological Society Annual Conference
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

“Que(e)rying Kim Davis: Culture, Camp, and Collective Outrage”

March 24, 2016, Popular Culture Association Annual Conference
Seattle, Washington

“Imagining Community: Trans-generational Exchange and Contested Borders at the Lesbian Herstory Archives”

November 14, 2014, National Women’s Studies Association Annual Conference
San Juan, Puerto Rico.

“Pride and Prejudice: Identity, Sexual Storytelling, and the Politics of Inclusion in One Sex-Positive Group “

February 25, 2012, Eastern Sociological Society Annual Conference
New York, New York.

“I hear you. I see you”: Invisibility, Resistance, and the Intersection of Gender and Sexuality in One Butch-Femme Online Community”

August 18, 2012, Society for the Study of Social Problems Annual Conference
Denver, CO.

GUEST LECTURES

“Ethnographic Methods in the Digital Field Workshop”

January 16th and 18th, 2015, Mass Communications Senior Seminar
Christopher Newport University

“LGBTQ (Mis)Representation in Popular Music”

February 20, 2013, Guest Lecture, Diversity Issues in Contemporary Music
Syracuse University

“Applying an Intersectional Lens to Contemporary Pop Culture”

November 5, 2012, Guest Lecture, Latina Feminist Theories
Syracuse University

“The Social Construction of Heterosexuality”

October 17, 2011, Guest Lecture, Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies
Syracuse University

SERVICE AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Faculty Chapter Advisor, Alpha Kappa Delta Honor Society, Christopher Newport University

August 2016-Present

Committee for IDEA Survey Support, Christopher Newport University

August 2016-Present

Faculty Core Advisor, Christopher Newport University

August 2016-Present

Associate Faculty Chapter Advisor, Alpha Phi Sigma Honor Society, Christopher Newport University

February 2016-Present

Committee Member, SSWA Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, Christopher Newport University

September 2015-January 2017

Panelist, Reel It Out Queer Film Festival Screening, Christopher Newport University

February 5th, 2015

Peer Reviewer, Transgender Studies Quarterly Journal (TSQ)

December, 2014

Faculty Advisor, Tea And You Social Club, Christopher Newport University

Fall 2014-Spring 2015

Graduate Representative, Department of Sociology Graduate Committee, Syracuse University

Fall 2011-Spring 2013

Committee Member and Co-founder, Syracuse LGBT Archives Project

Fall 2010-Present

Co-Advisor, Undergraduate Sociology Club

2009-2010

Community Outreach Coordinator, Women's Information Center
2009-2010

Committee Member, Undergraduate Curriculum Coordinating Committee
2008-2010

AWARDS AND HONORS

Alpha Kappa Delta International Sociology Honor Society
2008-Present

Joan Lukas Rothenberg Graduate Student Service Award
Department of Women's and Gender Studies, Syracuse University
2013

Outstanding Teaching Associate Award
Department of Women's and Gender Studies, Syracuse University
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Eastern Sociological Society Graduate Student Travel Award
2012

Roscoe Martin Fund for Research Recipient
Maxwell School, Syracuse University
2011

Syracuse University McNair Fellow
2008-2009

SUNY Brockport Excellence in Feminist Scholarship Award
2007